銃皇無尽のファフニール

スターダスト・クライ

XIII

ツカサ
Illustration
梱枝りこ

講談社ラノベ文庫

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銃皇無尽のファフニール

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XIII

ツカサ

Illustration

梱枝りこ

フィリル・クレスト
Firill Crest
輝くような金髪と見事なプロポーションを持つリーザ・ハイウォーカーは、ブラジャーのホックを止めようとしている姿勢で硬直していた。
その隣では、スカートを穿く途中だったフィリル・クレストが、白い太ももを晒したまま動きを止めている。
リーザ・ハイウォーカー
Lisa Highwalker

俺の頭を胸に抱きしめるようにして眠っていたのは、銀髪の少女――イリス・フレイア。
「んぅ……あたし……
ごめん……
もっと……ミツキちゃん……
ごめんね……」
物部悠
Yuu Monobe

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Prologue

"Leave everything to me."
These were merely words for expressing my wish and resolve... Mononobe Mitsuki's.
However, when the wind carried my voice back to my ears—I realized that my words just now were identical to what Nii-san had said three years ago.
Back then, in front of Hekatonkheir which was approaching the town where we siblings lived, Nii-san had said that to me.
Leave everything to me—
Smiling wryly at the thought of how similar we siblings were, I felt a pain deep in my chest.
Due to the brightness from the setting sun's rays from the western sky, I rubbed my eye. In other words, I rubbed away the tears that were inexplicably seeping from my eye while I looked down at Marduk's deck below.
Nii-san was reaching towards me while I was in the sky.
Even though it was impossible to reach... Even though it was too late—
Three years ago, the same expression must have appeared on my face. A pained realization.
Astonishment and confusion, the insecurity of being left behind, loneliness...
Simply the sight of the grievous look on Nii-san's face was enough to multiply the torment in my heart.
Perhaps this might be my last look at Nii-san's face. If possible, I would like to imprint a more wonderful expression onto my mind, but alas, it was not to be.
Because I had drawn my bow at Iris-san, sabotaged Marduk and become the "enemy" hindering Nii-san and the others from achieving their goal.
Right now, my only ally was the fake Shinomiya Miyako hovering by my side.
Was it due to the effects of end matter? Her skin was brown. The naginata fictional armament in her hand was also stained pitch black. However, her face, voice and motions were completely identical to Miyako's.
"Mitsuki."
Miyako—No, *Miyako-san*—urged me gently.
I was perfectly aware. Although Nii-san and Vritra on the deck were unable to fly, once Lisa-san and the others arrived, I might not be able to leave.
"Yes, let us depart—Miyako-san."

I did not address her name directly without honorifics as I had done back when she was alive. This was to warn and remind myself that she was not the real Miyako.
Controlling the air generated from my fictional armament, I flew south. Miyako followed after me with a slight delay. I looked back, wondering if anyone was going to pursue me, but apparently not.
Giving off black smoke, Marduk gradually receded from my view, slowly disappearing into the other side of the horizon.
"Where are we off to next? Our interests are aligned *except for what you are planning to do at the end, Mitsuki*. I've already promised to aid you fully from this point onwards... So why don't we take a detour? I'd like to spend as much with you as possible, Mitsuki."
Accelerating to fly side by side with me, Miyako-san asked me in a cheerful voice.
This cheerful smiling face and bouncy voice, buried deep in my memories, were things that I never thought I would ever see again, hear again.
—Nevertheless, she was definitely not the real Miyako.
Although she said she would assist me, it was probably for gathering all end matter in one place. Like how Bahamut had connected unknown territories together, there was perhaps some kind of significance to the unification of end matter.
After all, she was part of the ninth dragon.
Suppressing the surge of burning feelings and tears, I spoke.
"There is no time for a detour. We must head straight for the two remaining unknown territories. The one closest to here... is in North Africa, I suppose. That being said, it is still four or five thousand kilometers away..."
I took out my portable terminal and checked the map. The screen displayed my current location and the inputted coordinates of one of the unknown territories.
"Really? What a shame. However... Is it really okay for you to be carrying that? Since it's Midgard-issued equipment, won't it expose our location?"
Miyako-san seemed more concerned about the terminal's presence than the distance to our destination. There was a worried look on her face.
"Perhaps, but it would be challenging to reach the destination without relying on GPS. In any case, Nii-san and the others already know where we are headed, so there is no point worrying over this. What matters most is to stay ahead of the chase."
"...In that case, just sabotaging the battleship might not be enough. Mitsuki, your brother and the others might call for a plane from somewhere to chase us."
Hearing the point Miyako-san made, I gritted my teeth. It was definitely within the realm of possibility.
Although flight powered by generation of air was fast, it could not break the sound barrier without a group effort. For one person, roughly 300 kilometers per hour was the absolute limit. No matter how much we

hurried, flying to the next unknown territory would take over ten hours. Furthermore, it was necessary to take breaks along the way.
If Nii-san and the others got their hands on transportation such as a plane, they could catch up to me.
"In that case, we must make haste. If need be, I can simply dispose of the terminal and hide, then being discovered would not be an issue."
Rueful that she had pointed out the naivete in my thinking, I spoke in a forceful tone.
This was a sudden course of action. Originally, I wanted to do some planning before moving out, but back then—Just as I heard from Miyako-san about the method for eliminating all end matter, I happened to run into Iris-san and failed to control myself.
With everything exposed, my only recourse was to leave… Doing things over was not an option now.
"Really? Then let me help you. The way I am now, I should be able to fly faster than you, Mitsuki."
Saying that, she suddenly held my arm.
I thought her body would feel cold like a dead person's, but her palm felt soft against my skin, even slightly warmer than my own temperature.
Next, holding my arm tightly, she accelerated all at once.
"What—?"
Unbelievable speed. We kept flying past the clouds in the sky.
What on earth was this speed—No, before that, my wind should be interfering with hers when we are so close together...
What surprised me even more was that there were no signs of her transmuting air.
What ought to happen was for us to increase our speed through perfect coordination but I had not devoted any effort towards that at all. In spite of that, we were advancing at an abnormal speed.
"Anyway, all we need to do is fly in this direction, right?"
"Yes, that is correct—"
Confused, I nodded. She sped up further.
"I will take you to the destination like this, Mitsuki. You be in charge of navigation."
Miyako-san looked back and smiled at me.
By the time I noticed, there was an iridescent halo over her head.
Intangible, it was wavering faintly like an aurora. Practically like an angel's halo—But what on earth was it?
—She was more than just a fake Miyako, something like that?
Watching Shinomiya Miyako flying at high speed with an unknown power, I revised my earlier disdain for her slightly.
I used to think that in my current state, I could easily seal her away again. However, complacency and carelessness might be risky.
Although this current flying speed was useful, I had a feeling that it was going to be too late if I did not take care of her soon.

—But just a little longer… While she is still my ally…
My own weakness must be the reason why I was thinking such thoughts.
Her perfect resemblance to my best friend was not the entire reason. I was afraid of being alone. After all, until now, I had never fought alone.
When facing Hekatonkheir, I had Nii-san with me. At Midgard, I had my comrades in the Dragon Subjugation Squad.
Nii-san, Lisa-san and the others surfaced in my mind. I felt terrible in the depths of my chest.
Only now did I truly realize how much support I had received from them.
Of course, this unease did not stem purely from my awareness that Miyako-san was going to turn into my enemy eventually. It was also because she had told me about a certain "upside."
However, there was definitely apprehension in my heart about fighting alone.
But once the final unknown territory was sealed—Or perhaps the instant prior to that, the two of us would undoubtedly be in opposition.
I prayed from the depths of my heart that when time came, she would take action as a clear "enemy."

*

"Leave everything to me."
With these parting words, Mituski flew off into the orange sky of dusk. She was accompanied by the fake Shinomiya Miyako—
Knowing it was too late to reach her, I lowered my arm, standing rooted to the spot.
Vritra and I were the only ones left on the deck of the Marduk whose main engine was emitting black smoke.
"What are her intentions…? If she is going to handle the remaining unknown territories as she claimest, why run away—?"
Two sizes smaller than Kili, with black hair fluttering and a young face, Vritra murmured in surprise.
I suddenly noticed the green vine wrapped around Vritra's pale and slender neck. It was one of Yggdrasil's terminals, which prevented her from transmuting dark matter so long as this collar remained.
Although the collar was durable enough such that it was impossible to break by ordinary means, such as pulling it by hand or severing it with a blade, it should be easy for Tia to remove.
It should be easily to repair Marduk as long as they freed Vritra and made use of her massive quantity of dark matter, but—

'—Let Mononobe Mitsuki absorb all of the darkness, then kill her along with it using Code Lost.'

Recalling the words she had uttered, I gave up on this thought. If Vritra

were to regain her freedom now, it was highly likely for her to take an oppositional stance against us.
Chasing after Mitsuki immediately was impossible. I clenched my fist and accepted this fact.
There had been an opportunity. Before Mitsuki flew away... Had I not hesitated for a moment—

'Iris-san is in my cabin. It would be best if you hurried to save her.'

When Mitsuki said that, I took action a step too late.
—I did not believe Mitsuki would do anything to threaten Iris' life, but...
It was necessary to confirm. And out from Mitsuki's shadow emerged Shinomiya Miyako.
Unable to hold back the anxiety in my heart, I ran to the hatch leading into the ship.
"Hey, where art thou going!?"
Vritra yelled from behind me, but there was no time to respond to her.
Although I ought to be worrying about Iris under such circumstances, it was with feelings of irritation and guilt, as though I had committed a grave mistake, that I rushed towards Mitsuki's cabin.
Faint smoke and the stench of burning drifted in the air along the way.
Halfway, I encountered the panicking Lisa and Firill.
"Mononobe Yuu! What on earth is with this smoke!?"
"Oh, Mononobe-kun! Although Ariella and the others went over to the bridge, if there's a fire, shouldn't we mobilize to engage in firefighting?"
Listening to them, I linked my senses to Marduk to examine the extent of the damage.
As "linkers," Jeanne and I were the ones operating this gigantic battleship. Just by focusing my mind, I was able to manipulate and check the ship as though it was part of my own body.
"The fire extinguishers have already started working. I'll save the details for later. You two should go standby at the bridge too."
I swiftly replied to them and immediately continued on my way.
As a linker, I was originally able to observe the cabins immediately, but right now, I had imposed a self-restriction to prevent peeking into the cabins which were private spaces. As a result, I could not obtain visual confirmation on the cabin situation.
After arriving at Mitsuki's cabin, I used my linker authorization to open the door.
"Oh... Mononobe—"
Inside was Iris, immobilized by an elastic substance resembling rubber.
Looking up at me, her eyes were red and I knew she had cried earlier.
Shion was asleep on the bed, but she was not restrained.
"Thank goodness... You're okay—"

I bent down in front of her to check to see if she was hurt. Next, I created a knife using transmutation and carefully freed her from her restraints.
"Mononobe... How is Mitsuki-chan?"
"—She flew away after sabotaging Marduk. She's probably headed to another unknown territory."
I tried to keep my emotions under control as much as possible while sharing confirmed information and highly probably deductions.
"Really...? Sorry, I'm sorry, Mononobe... I'm sure it's my fault. I totally didn't understand Mitsuki-chan's feelings—I even said all that on my own when I clearly didn't understand... That's why—"
Weeping, Iris apologized to me. I hugged her and patted her head to calm her down.
"Did something happen?"
I asked in a gentle tone of voice and Iris explained in fits and starts.
It had happened just earlier when Iris came to this cabin. By chance, she ran into Mitsuki who was planning to go somewhere. Then Mitsuki suddenly drew her fictional armament of a bow against her.
Then she had heard Mitsuki's true feelings—
"...Mitsuki-chan does not doubt your 'current feelings,' Mononobe. She doesn't think they're fake because they stem from instinct. However... She is very afraid of the future. Once end matter is eliminated, Mononobe, will you no longer have any reason to protect Mitsuki-chan... Your instinct will disappear... This is what she fears the most."
"The future... Once end matter is eliminated—"
I muttered in shock. I had not thought that far ahead since it was still uncertain whether such a goal was possible to achieve.
However... After briefly giving thought to it, icy terror and despair crept up my spine.
If Neun's instinct were to disappear, my mind would definitely be affected. Perhaps the "Mononobe Yuu" who regards Mitsuki as dearest would vanish.
"Mitsuki-chan said that to see you with your feelings for her changed... would be worse than death. Then with her bow aimed at me, she..."
Listening to Iris, I gritted my teeth hard.
Why had I failed to think of this? I cursed my own negligence. I could have reached this answer if only I had given thought to it again and again and again. Once armed with the answer, I would have been able to stop Mitsuki before things reached this point—
—Are you really sure?
However, my calm self asked from the depths of my heart. Even if I had known that this would happen, would I really be able to find a solution to avoid this conflict?
I would search for a solution to enable everyone to survive without sacrificing Mitsuki. However, Mitsuki did not seek this herself.
Did my chagrin reach Iris? She tapped me on the chest.

When I released her from my embrace, she stared at me with tears in her eyes.
"Mononobe... Do you feel lost?"
Faced with her question, I nodded hesitantly.
"Yeah—What should I've done earlier...? And what should I do next? I've no clue."
Iris proceeded to shake her head seriously.
"No, Mononobe, you shouldn't feel lost. I'm the one who knew nothing and messed up completely... All I ended up doing was say things that hurt Mitsuki-chan... But it'll be different for you, Mononobe. I'm sure your words will definitely reach Mitsuki-chan."
With eyes glowing with strong determination, Iris asserted.
"But I—"
"Because, Mononobe, you've always been together with Mitsuki-chan, right? *Before becoming Neun*, you've always been together—"
Iris interrupted me and spoke with a gentle smile.
My heart skipped a beat violently.
That's right... The time I became Neun was during the car accident that had killed Mitsuki's parents. Before that, Mitsuki and I were already together.
Of course, it was true that Neun's instinct was added after that, but—even without any special identity, I was a definitely...
I could feel my confusion vanishing. Banishing the regret and uncertainty that froze my body back to the depths of my heart, I stood up.
"Thank you, Iris, because of you, I managed to come up with the words I must convey to Mitsuki."
"Then Mononobe—"
Iris' expression brightened up and I extended my hand towards her, helping her up to her feet. I nodded.
"Yeah, let's chase after Mitsuki."
Having decided what to do, the next step was to contemplate how to going about doing it.
Due to the internal damage, Marduk could no longer set sail. Although it was possible to build a new Marduk by borrowing Vritra's power, my viewpoint and hers were in opposition.
She had suggested that using Code Lost to eliminate Mitsuki together with the end matter would be the best solution, to which I refused. This schism could not be bridged so easily.
Even if we released her seal, there was no guarantee that Vritra would listen to my request. In the worst case, we might become enemies. Given the current situation, increasing the number of enemies was not an option.
Hence—To chase after Mitsuki, we needed to borrow another set of "legs" no matter what.

Chapter 1 - The Naglfar in Pursuit

Part 1

"Mitsuki, it's in sight."
With Miyako-san holding my hand, we flew at high altitude for approximately three hours.
I—Mononobe Mituski—arrived within visual confirmation of the unknown territory at North Africa.
The sun had set and countless stars were twinkling in the sky. However, a piece of the night sky had been gouged out by the top of the towering dome of "darkness" ahead.
"Already... I see, huh?"
Without assisting in flying, simply deploying an air barrier to stave off the wind, I murmured in disbelief.
The journey probably would have taken thrice as long if relying on the transmutation of air. Speaking of which, because the journey was too fast, I still had yet to prepare myself mentally.
"How about taking a break nearby?"
As though reading my mind, Miyako-san pointed at the ground. The iridescent halo over her head glowed faintly.
Even with only moonlight and starlight for illumination, it was still possible to discern the terrain to some extent.
Trees were growing sparsely on the undulating land. There was a lake further up ahead with a small vilage next to it.
Miyako-san lowered her flying speed and altitude, stopping over the village.
Even though she was not pulling me, I remained floating gently in the sky. It was like entering a zone of zero gravity. My hair and skirt were also floating on their own.
"...Good advice. Perhaps there is a 'true dragon' in that unknown territory too. Some preparation is in order."

Looking at the deserted village, I nodded. Since the unknown territory was visible from here, the villagers had presumably evacuated.
"Got it. Oh, but if you're worried about fighting, that's unnecessary."
While landing, Miyako-san smiled cheerfully. Her confidence intrigued me, so I asked:
"Why is that?"
As soon as my feet made contact with the ground, the floating feeling vanished. At the same time, the iridescent halo over Miyako-san's head disappeared too.
"This is a privilege for letting me be your ally, you know? I must have told you when we were 'negotiating,' right? There exist unknown territories you cannot reach without me."
Miyako-san spoke in a joking tone of voice and shrugged.
"Indeed you did—Although I did express my doubt."
While examining her carefully, I nodded.
This was the most important reason why I had allowed her to accompany me despite being a fake.
"Sheesh, you're so mean. I won't lie to you, Mitsuki. You'll know if you get close, but gravity around that unknown territory has multiplied several fold. The closer you get, the stronger. Near the boundary, it's a space of supergravity that'll instantly crush a human into paste."
She motioned towards the black dome in the distance and spoke seriously.
"In that case... Assuming what you say is true, then it is not the effect of end matter, since the same phenomenon did not occur at other unknown territories. Come to think of it... Could it be a 'true dragon'?"
"Yes, the power of the fourth dragon—'Heavy Tremor' Nova... Or rather, its original state."
"'Heavy Tremor' Nova..."
I repeated the name of the obstacle standing in my way. It was a being on the same level as Bahamut and Nyarlathotep, both of which had taken the whole team's combined effort to take down with difficulty. To take on such an opponent with only two people—
"Don't look so worried, Mitsuki. Didn't I say there's no need to worry about it turning into a fight? Relax, Nova won't be stopping you, Mitsuki, because I am the one who is allowing that 'frame' to return to this world."
"Huh...?"
Instantly, I looked back at her, my eyes saying "I cannot comprehend what you are talking about at all."
Seeing me puzzled, she smiled wryly and placed her hand on her chest.
"You've noticed, right? I am able to use incredible powers."
"……Yes. Without creating air through transmutation, you were flying at high speed through the sky."
I nodded stiffly and looked at her questioningly.
"Well—Rather than choosing not to create air, I *cannot create it*."
Seeing her smiling wryly, I was confused.

"You cannot?"
"That's right. Dark matter and end matter have very poor compatibility. A being that 'approached the end' at one point cannot use dark matter very well, seeing as dark matter is the solidification of possibility. Although I can generate it, performing transmutation is impossible. Watch—"
Giving this answer, she raised her hand and generated a baseball-sized sphere of dark matter. The dark matter's surface turned silver and started to materialize, then it started to crack—
Boom!
"Kyah!?"
Startled by the explosion during the process of transmutation, I fell backwards.
"See, this happens no matter what I try to make. It collapses in the middle of the process. I guess it's hindered by the contamination from my end matter."
The sight of her, waving away the fragments in her hand with a smile, filled me with a sense of deja vu.
—It was almost like the case with Iris-san...
Recalling the classmate who was worrying about me and offering encouragement to the very end, I felt my chest tighten. Of course, Iris-san had no relation to end matter at all, so she was simply bad at using dark matter, I suppose.
"Cough... Indeed, this definitely cannot be used to fly in the air..."
Choking from the smoke of the explosion, I commented softly.
"That's right, which is why I have to use this power to fly in the sky."
Miyako-san nodded firmly and gestured by moving her gaze upwards.
Next, an iridescent halo appeared over her head. Her slender body proceeded to slowly float into the air.
"This is the power of a "true dragon"—Nova."
"Why... are you capable of this—"
Although I had already guessed from our conversation, I still had trouble hiding my surprise. Looking at me with interest, she resumed her explanation with a carefree tone.
"Nova itself was originally something like a phenomenon. Anything can serve as its core as long as it is matter. Hence, this vessel was chosen with the added responsibility of negotiating with you, Mitsuki."
"Something like that, no way..."
I noticed my voice was trembling.
With her shoulder-length hair fluttering in the wind, the thing that had taken on Shinomiya Miyako's form told me the answer.
"Let's sum up, Mitsuki. I, Shinomiya Miyako, am currently the Fourth Dragon—'Heavy Tremor' Nova."

Part 2

Slicing through the night sky, flying past stars and clouds, the battleship advanced through the air.
On the bridge of this ship, outfitted with lost technology, I—Mononobe Yuu—looked up at the external scenery shown on a monitor.
Between gaps in the clouds flowing past, one could see countless twinkling stars with occasional fleeting glimpses of the moon.
It was currently 22:00. Counting from the time when Mitsuki flew off from Marduk, roughly four hours had elapsed.
"How does it feel, 2nd Lieutenant Mononobe? To ride in my *Naglfar*."
Observing the bridge, sitting in the captain's seat was a man—Major Loki Jotunheim—who asked me in a smiling voice.
Indeed, instead of Marduk, my current location was inside the *Naglfar*, the anti-dragon battleship belonging to NIFL.
"It's much less stable than Marduk. Also, the engine noice is a bit of a bother."
I offered him my honest opinion.
Perhaps strongly affected by air currents, the ship was shaking frequently. The engine's piercing noise was also quite an ordeal for the ears. Not a pleasant ride.
"Hoho, oh well, that's only to be expected when compared to Marduk. That ship is most likely filled with technology that we of NIFL have yet to replicate. In spite of that, you still disposed of it—What a waste."
"I've said so many times already. Left alone, the engine was going to explode. The aftershock of the explosion could cause immense destruction."
Without any change in expression, I gave the superficial reason.
In reality, I did it to prevent NIFL from getting their hands on Marduk.
Although we needed "legs" to chase after Mitsuki, the *Naglfar* was the only surviving means of transport nearby. All other ships and aircraft had been destroyed by Bahamut's attacks.
As a result, we had requested aid from Major Loki, captain of the *Naglfar*, but had we left Marduk behind, NIFL would have taken it.
Were NIFL to obtain technology beyond their current level, it would probably lead to a crisis for us Ds. Consequently, I had Iris disintegrate Marduk completely using Catastrophe.
But ever since we moved to their ship, they had been showing displeasure regarding this matter. Not just Major Loki but also that machine intellect too—
"In that case, just eliminate the engine! Are you retarded?"

The bridge monitor flickered momentarily before a young girl with transparent wings appeared.
Although she looked similar to a fairy from folklore, Atla was actually the ultimate machine intellect that had been responsible for managing and running the civilization of Atlantis before it was lost. It would be no exaggeration to call her "Ultimate Wisdom" Atlantis.
Buried in the ruins of Atlantis, data for constructing her had been carved onto stone tablets. Using this as a foundation, NIFL had revived this machine intellect.
But apparently, only Atla's core was reconstructed due to losses in the saved data. As a result, both the virtual avatar shown on the screen and her behavior were quite childish.
"Just as a precaution. Marduk has weapons everywhere. Who knows if things could go wrong somehwere and cause explosions?"
I shrugged and brushed off Atla's accusation.
"Grrrr..."
Pouting, Atla's kept glaring at me unhappily, but I did not pay her any attention. Instead, I turned my gaze to Major Loki.
"By the way, Major Loki, are you really going to assist us without any strings attached?"
When we first made the request, he had accepted without mentioning any terms or conditions... But I had my doubts the whole time.
"Indeed. Naturally, I hoped you could have provided me with Marduk if possible, but from the start, I never intended to make this a condition. After all, you guys are the trump card for saving the world and mankind."
Major Loki nodded after smiling faintly, then continued.
"There are unknown territories remaining at North Africa and the Southern Atlantic—as well as dragons possibly hidden within them. To oppose them, your power is essential. Although we have our differences, ultimately, what matters is saving the world. I have no intention of saying useless things. Do whatever you want."
"That's very... generous of you."
Although I was grateful for what he had said, it felt quite suspicious for developments to unfold so easily. Making a deal would put me more at ease.
"I believe this is for the best. Because you defeated me. Instead of me taking command, you will surely lead us to a better result."
It would be problem otherwise—Major Loki's eyes seemed to say as he gazed at me.
In other words, so long as I continued to meet his expectations, he would continue to offer assistance generously. Despite feeling extraordinary pressure, I still nodded without hesitation.
"Very well. Of course."
After I asserted myself, Major Loki smiled with satisfaction.

At that moment, a panicking voice was heard from the monitor.
"Master! Bad news! The unknown territory in North Africa disappeared! Confirmed through satellite surveillance, the swallowed cities and people seem to be unharmed."
Hearing this, Major Loki brought his hand to the corner of his lips. I too looked in surprise at the satellite image displayed on the monitor.
Indeed, the black dome of the unknown territory was no longer there.
"Did Mitsuki do that...? But that's way too fast—"
I groaned with disbelief. She had only flown off four hours ago. Even if traveling on a supersonic jet, this was not enough time to reach the African continent.
Hearing my whisper, Major Loki spoke with a stiff expression.
"However, there is no one else capable of doing this apart from her, right? Then we should accept reality. And what we must do is alter our course. Atla—head over to the Southern Atlantic unknown territory at maximum speed."
"Affirmative, Master."
Atla bowed from the monitor.
Next, the *Naglfar* slowly changed course. Even from the bridge, it was possible to hear the engine noise increase.
Incidentally, the only member of NIFL on the *Naglfar* was Major Loki. The rest of the crew had apparently disembarked before the battle against Bahamut. Even so, controlling the ship was apparently not a problem as long as Atla was present.
"I will tell the others about this."
I turned around to head back to the cabins where my friends were resting.
"2nd Lieutenant Mononobe, it will take six hours no matter how much we hurry. You should get some rest too."
"—Yes. I understand."
Despite my impatience, I controlled my feelings and nodded. If I were to falter, everyone else would worry.
I took a deep breath to adjust my emotions. Next, I saluted Major Loki briefly then left the bridge.

Part 3

Although Major Loki was the only one remaining on the ship, the *Naglfar* originally had a large crew. Hence, the ship contained far more cabins than Marduk.
The captain's cabin was the only single. The rest were basically all cabins designed for four.
My companions were taking a break, settling themselves into cramped cabins featuring two sets of bunk beds each. Of course, putting everyone into one cabin would be impossible so they were distributed among three cabins. Although there were more than enough cabins for everyone to each have their own, Shinomiya-sensei advised for us to stick together as much as possible. She probably decided that being alone in our current situation could have adverse effects on our psychological states.
Listening to the the deep noise coming from the ventilator, I advanced along the corridor where exposed wires and pipes could be seen. Then I arrived in front of the cabins my companions were occupying.
Although I believed my companions would open their doors if I were to call out, it was possible they were already sleeping. In that case, it would be better to talk to them later. Thinking that, I decided to knock each door one by one.
As things stood currently, we were hurrying to an unknown territory, which was not urgent news. Top priority right now was for us to alleviate the fatigue sustained during the battle against Bahamut.
Since I had no idea how the cabins were assigned, I gently knocked on the door of the first cabin.
No response even after I waited for a while. *Asleep as suspected, I suppose.* Thinking that, I moved to the door of the next cabin, but there was no response either.
However, just as I was about to leave that door, I heard a tiny sound. The door opened from inside.
"Hmm...?"
Then nothing happened. Wondering what was going on, I went nearer. Suddenly, a pale arm reached out from the gap in the door, grabbing my hand and pulling me forcefully into the cabin.
It was dark in the cabin. Not yet accustomed to the darkness, my eyes could see nothing.
"Hey—"
"Quiet. Don't wake up Iris-chan or Tia."
However, I realized the identity of the perpetrator from her voice, interrupting my protests. Soon after, an outline appeared in my surroundings and I gradually became able to see the pretty face of the girl before my eyes.
"Kili, what are you trying to do?"
I lowered my voice and asked her—Kili Surtr Muspelheim.
"Very well, come over a bit."

Instead of answering my question, she pushed me from behind, directing me to the bunk bed.
There was fabric hanging on the side of the bed, preventing me from seeing past inside. When I was forced into the bed, a faint light appeared in my view.
"Oh, 'tis my comrade, yes? Perfect timing."
The light source was a light from a personal terminal. On the bed, a young girl two sizes smaller than Kili was sitting all alone. For some reason, she was holding playing cards in her hands. Cards were also scattered on the blanket.
"Vritra too... What on earth are you two doing?"
I directed my confused gaze at the one who would be considered Kili's mother—her creator, the black dragon, "Black" Vritra.
"You can tell just by looking. We're playing cards. Ever since Iris-chan and Tia went to bed, it's been us two playing, but Mother sucks, so it's not fun at all. However, she insists on playing until she wins..."
The one who answered was Kili who followed me onto the bed.
There was practically no place to move once three people were packed onto a bed meant for a single adult to lie down.
"I don't plan on playing—"
Preoccupied with Mitsuki's situation, I intended to refuse.
"Iris-chan said the same thing. *That's why* I want you to join."
However, Kili replied forcefully and pushed me over to Vritra's side.
"Yuu, team up with Mother. Then there will finally be some competition."
"Hmph, then I shall borrow thy lap for a while."
Vritra nimbly sat her petite body on my lap. As a result, there was slightly more space on the bed, but it also made it more difficult for me to move.
"...Are you worried?"
Resigned to my situation, I asked, causing Kili to turn her gaze away with displeasure.
"When the always overly cheerful Iris-chan is this depressed, even other people get affected. Tia is all gloomy too, so I'm just taking over some what Iris-chan normally does."
Kili started with a very firm tone of voice, but she stared me straight in the eye mid-sentence and spoke even more assertively.
"As my mate, Yuu, having a bit of time for recreation with me wouldn't be too much, right? You're going to woo your sister next, aren't you? Then you need to do your absolute best. You must make a display of what you're capable of."
"Uh, calling it wooing would be a bit..."
Although I wanted to object, I realized she was not wrong and my voice faltered.
"Well, personally, I'd prefer to have one fewer rival and I won't have to write a mountain of repentance essays anymore... *But you wouldn't be the Yuu I love if you gave up on her*. So I'll be generous here."

With an assertive smile, Kili picked up her cards that were on the blanket and stared at me. With her having said this much, there was no way I could run away.
"—Got it. Then let me be your opponent. We have to win, Vritra."
I placed my hand on Vritra's black-haired head and spoke. Even though we had opposing views on the matter of Mitsuki, right now I was going to help her out as partners.
"Counting on thee, my comrade. Guide me to the path of victory after twelve losses in a row."
Sitting on my lap, Vritra clenched her fist.
Based on what Kili had said just now, Vritra was not going to call it quits until she won. Then I must help her seriously.
"Now that's really losing badly. What exactly are you two playing?"
There were many ways to play cards. To lose this badly, it should be some kind of strategic game, but—
"Old maid."
Kili answered and slumped her shoulders. This was basically a game of luck, so for Vritra to lose this badly, her face must be as easy to read as an open book.
"...Vritra, there is no sure-win strategy. However, there is a way for you to counter Kili."
"What!? Thou art truly reliable as one would expect. Use it, this method."
"It's like this."
From behind, I pinched Vritra's cheeks with my fingers and pulled my hands in opposite directions sideways.
Stretching Vritra's soft face wide caused Kili, sitting opposite from us, to burst out laughing.
"H-Hoho... M-Mother, that face—"
Although she was keeping her voice down to avoid waking up Iris and Tia, Kili's shoulder heaved up and down greatly.

"C-Comwade, waat ees the meeeening of dis?"
Vritra hammered against my arms in protest, but I replied directly without loosening my grip.
"Okay, try playing in this state. You'll have a shot at victory now."
"H-Hmm—fine."
Despite her partial skepticism, Vritra still began her game of old maid.
This was nothing more than stretching Vritra's face to prevent Kili from reading her expression, while disrupting Kili's composure at the same time.
In the end—Vritra won handily afterwards.

Part 4

After leaving Kili and Vritra's room, I knocked at the next door.
Immediately, I heard a soft reply and the door opened quietly. A face poked out from the dim cabin. It was Shinomiya Haruka, commander-in-chief of Midgard and homeroom teacher of my Class Brynhildr. Still dressed in her suit, she had untied her ponytail. Was it because she had relaxed part of her adult image? Under her black hair, her beautiful face seemed younger than usual.
"—So it's you, Mononobe Yuu, what is the matter?"
Rubbing her eyes, she exited her cabin and closed the door. She had asked in a lowered voice, probably to avoid waking those who were sleeping in their cabins.
"Shinomiya-sensei, I'm sorry for disturbing you this late. I wanted to report to you about the unknown territory in Northern Africa disappearing..."
I replied apologetically because Shinomiya-sensei still looked a little sleepy-eyed.
Perhaps I had woken her up. On further thought, ever since the battle against Bahamut began—no, ever since the night of the fireworks festival—Shinomiya-sensei must have been busy without a moment's rest. On board Marduk, she was the communications officer and point person for coordinating various parties. After we boarded the *Naglfar*, she had to handle all kinds of procedures too
"Is that so...? Mononobe Mitsuki's doing, presumably."
"Yes, most probably. The *Naglfar* is currently heading straight for the unknown territory in the southern Atlantic. ETA is six hours at least. Well then—I'm very sorry for disturbing your rest."

Deciding I must not talk for too long, reducing Shinomiya-sensei's time for sleep, I was going to leave immediately.
"Wait, Mononobe Yuu. Are you… holding up alright?"
However, hearing her call me back from behind, I turned around
"Although I'm a bit tired, since I'll be taking a break next, you don't need to worry."
Despite my answer, Shinomiya-sensei shook her head.
"No, I was asking about your mental state, not your physical condition."
Her sharp gaze shot at me, despite her fatigue. I understood what she was truly inquiring about.
"……About Mitsuki flying off, I am definitely quite shocked. Why hadn't I realized earlier—realized what was going through Mitsuki's mind—I feel very regretful about that. However, I don't feel lost. I've already decided what I must do."
Thanks to Iris, the words I must say to Mitsuki had surfaced in my mind. Hence, all I had to do now was focus my attention on hurrying over to Mitsuki's side.
When I voiced my current thoughts, Shinomiya-sensei smiled wryly.
"You… are very strong. Looks like I do not need to worry about you. You and I… are very different."
Saying this with self-deprecation, Shinomiya-sensei's face showed not only weariness but anguish. Seeing her expression, I noticed the pain that Shinomiya-sensei was suffering, different from mine.
"Is it about your sister—the fake Shinomiya Miyako?"
When I asked after some hesitation, she nodded weakly.
"Indeed... I gathered Marduk's external video and voice recordings. Although her complexion is darker, she is identical to Miyako in all other respects. Face, movements, voice, tone… Nothing about her seems fake to me."
"But—"
"I know. She is a being created by end matter, that I do know. However, even though my logical mind knows this, I cannot accept it emotionally. Furthermore, there is Shion. If Shion were to meet her face to face… I have been thinking plenty about matters of this sort, which is why I could not sleep at all."
Interrupting me, Shinomiya-sensei slumped her shoulders and rubbed her eyelids with her fingers.
"…Shion?"
Instead of talking about Shinomiya Miyako, I asked about Shion.
Shion could be considered Miyako's daughter. From Shion's standpoint, her position might be even more difficult than either Mitsuki's or Shinomiya-sensei's.
Hearing my question, Shinomiya-sensei glanced at the door.
"Though Jeanne Hortensia has been accompanying her the whole time, Shion has not waken up once, possibly due to extreme exhaustion from the

battle. I am worried... but I also hope she could remain asleep the whole time until the current situation is resolved. Shion and that Miyako... I do not want them to meet."
"That's something I understand."
Nodding deeply, I tried to imagine.
If Shion treated that Shinomiya Miyako as her real mother, it would probably turn into quite a difficult battle. How to avoid such a situation?
While I was thinking about this, Shinomiya-sensei apparently regained composure and spoke.
"...My apologies. I accidentally offloaded my worries onto you. My intention was to encourage you but this has reversed our positions. I am so useless as a teacher."
Sighing, Shinomiya-sensei smiled stiffly.
Seeing her put on a brave face, I acted reflexively.
—Pat.
"Mononobe... Yuu?"
Shinomiya-sensei stared at me with a puzzled look then her gaze shifted up. My hand was on top of her head.
"Oh, I-I wasn't thinking—"
Since I had been patting Shion and Tia on the head a lot lately, I almost did it unconsciously. The fact that Shinomiya-sensei looked younger than usual with her hair untied probably contributed too.

"A child doing this to an adult... That is not allowed."
Blushing slightly, Shinomiya-sensei reminded me. Flustered, I explained without changing posture.
"S-Sorry, but, how should I say this? Shinomiya-sensei, our ages are similar... In fact, it feels more like you're an upperclassman, so—"
"Even against upperclassman, the rudeness of this act remains unchanged. Now hurry and get your hand off."
"O-Okay."
I finally took my hand off Shinomiya-sensei's head. She coughed.
"However, I am grateful to you for worrying about me. Your hand... It is bigger than I thought."
Shinomiya-sensei gazed at my hand with interest.
"Well, I guess it's a bit bigger than a girl's..."
Thinking that my hand was not actually big, I nodded ambiguously. However, she smiled profoundly with acceptance for some reason.
"Really? I suppose that is only natural for a boy's hand. Although you surprised me, it did help to provide a change of pace. I should be able to sleep now, thank you."
The smile Shinomiya-sensei showed this time did not felt forced to me. With her face closer to mine than usual, along with a more intimate expression, I felt my heart speed up. At the same time, I took a step back.
"That's great. Then—I'll be on my way."
"Very well. You sweated a lot today too, it would be best if you got some proper rest. If you are looking for the bathroom, it is at the end of the hallway."
After saying that, Shinomiya-sensei returned to her cabin.
I was originally planning to head directly to my own cabin—designed to fit four, but allocated solely to me, of course, because of my gender—but after hearing what Shinomiya-sensei said, I decided to take a shower first.
There had been one cabin where no one answered me, but I suppose I could tell them tomorrow morning.
The previous room apparently contained Shion and Jeanne in addition to Shinomiya-sensei, which left the quartet of Lisa, Firill, Ren and Ariella. They must be the ones occupying the first cabin.
While advancing through the corridor, I set an alarm on my portable terminal.
Since ETA was at least six hours, I set the alarm for five hours from now. All I had to do was confirm the situation after getting up then talk to Lisa's group.
—However, diverting my attention to my terminal turned out to be a mistake.
Arriving at the bathroom, I opened the door without knocking—An unexpected scene appeared before my eyes.
Four girls were inside. They were the classmates I knew so well.
—Oh right. Instead of sleeping, they had gone to shower instead.

I realized the reason why the first cabin had no answer.
Lisa Highwalker, with her brilliant blonde hair and perfect bodily proportions, was frozen on the spot, still with her hands holding her bra's clasp.
Next to her, in the middle of putting on a skirt, Firill Crest had halted her movements with her pale thighs exposed.
Ariella Lu was using a towel to dry short little Ren Miyazawa's wet red hair.
The two of them stared speechlessly at me. Since they were wrapped in towels, my guess was they were not wearing underwear.
—Crap.
Although I prepared myself for screams and punishment, the girls' reaction was not what I expected.
"M-Mononobe Yuu! Entering without knocking is such a lapse in common sense! Goodness gracious... We will be dressed in a second. Turn around now."
Recovering her composure, Lisa blushed and reminded me, but her tone was more surprised than harsh.
"Mononobe-kun... It's too embarrassing if you keep staring. I'm not wearing my victory underwear right now, so..."
Firill did not really scold me. Instead, she continued dressing awkwardly.
Drying Ren's hair, Ariella stared at me with her face red, but I could not feel any anger from her.
"S-So careless, Mononobe-kun! E-Even if we've bathed together before, there is still a lot of mental preparation needed... Oh, Ren, what's wrong?"
Her slender body trembling shyly, Ren extended the towel in her hand for some reason, the one she had been using to dry her hair, presenting it to me.
"...Onii-chan, dry my hair."
Saying that, Ren handed my a towel. With a pair of endearing eyes staring intently at me, I nodded.
"O-Okay."
Although my mind had yet to catch up to the situation, I accepted the towel for now. With my back to Lisa and the others, I started to rub Ren's hair.
"Mm... Feels so good."
Ren commented with satisfaction.

"Then—you girls aren't angry?"
I asked them with hesitation.
"Angry? Why?"
Ren looked up at me with confusion.
From amid the sound of fabric friction, I heard Firill's puzzled voice.
"Didn't Ariella say so just now? We've already bathed with you before. With our naked selves exposed to you, you selected us to become your mates... Our relationship with you is already unseverable. Although it's embarrassing when we're seen in the middle of changing... We won't get angry if it's you, Mononobe-kun. Don't you agree, Lisa?"
"D-Do not rope me into the conversation! It is true that we are not angry—But even so, that does not imply we permit you to watch us change any time you want! Moderation is essential even when our relationships have grown in intimacy."
After Lisa's flustered response, Ariella agreed.
"Me too. I'd have a heart attack if this happened all the time. Mononobe-kun, I hope you could pay proper attention to picking the time and place."
Although Ariella gave me a reminder, Firill laughed in amusement on the side.
"Wonderful, Mononobe-kun. It's okay as long as you pay attention to the time and place."
"Eh!? No, that's not what I meant—"
Ariella's panicked voice was accompanied by laughter from Firill and Lisa.
Ren, whose hair I was drying, also shook her shoulders lightly.
However, silence immediately filled the entire space when their laughter ended.
The reason was obvious.
No one was laughing from the bottom of their heart. With one of our longtime companions missing, it felt like we had a hole in our heart even during times of joy.
Although Kili had been speaking calmly, this hole was not that easy to fill. It was probably impossible to fill unless we retrieved what was missing.
"Okay okay—No more joking around. We won't get angry at you this time, Mononobe-kun, okay?"
Finally, Ariella broke the silence, then Firill agreed.
"Yes... You've done everything you can for Mitsuki's sake. We know that."
Next, Lisa spoke with resolve.
"Our anger is all directed at Mitsuki-san currently, so we do not have any spare anger for you, Mononobe Yuu. A lesson must be taught to that child... who acted on her own again while keeping all kinds of thoughts to herself."
Ren also looked up at me and said:
"Me too... I have things to say to Mitsuki. I don't know if I can express myself well... But the message will never get across unless you speak the words."

Listening to everyone, I understood that they were being considerate for me and Mitsuki in their own ways.
The sound of clothing rustling had ended. I looked back to see that the girls were all dressed, staring at me seriously.
"Thank you, everyone—With all of you here, I'm sure Mitsuki and I will be fine. That's what I believe right now."
I spoke the words that had surfaced in my mind.
I was not the only one with words that must be conveyed to her. Noticing this, I felt my emotions relax somewhat.

Part 5

That night, I probably had a dream about Mitsuki.
Although I could not quite remember the contents, the heart wrenching pain still lingered when I woke up.
Checking the portable terminal by my pillow, I saw that it was fifteen minutes before my alarm. The rays of the morning sun were streaming into the round window of my personal cabin.
—Although it was a bit early, I guess I should head to the bridge to confirm the situation.
Thinking that, I got up. Inside the dim cabin, I heard knocking at the door.
"Yuu, are you there? Hmm, maybe this isn't the cabin..."
Then I heard a voice calling my name.
It seemed like she had called out several times already. Perhaps the knocking at the door was the reason why I had woken up before my alarm.
"No, this is the right place. I'm going to open the door now."
I got off the bunk bed and opened the room to the cabin.
At the door was a young girl with a pair of horns on her head. She looked relieved to see me.
"Oh, Yuu! Good morning!"
The girl with pink fluttering twintails on the sides of her head—Tia Lightning—greeted me.
"Yeah, good morning, Tia. What's up?"
My original plan was to get up early to check out the situation. Waking up Kili, who was rooming with Tia, to relay the situation to them was supposed to be later.

"You know, even while sleeping, Tia has been using Yggdrasil's processing power to think, and using the Akashic Record to gather data from NIFL's networks. Tia came up with lots of ideas and wants to share with Yuu..."
"...You're really working hard. Thank you, Tia."
When I thanked Tia and patted her head, she partially closed her eyes in pleasure.
"Mm... This is all Tia can do. Tia hopes to help Mitsuki too."
Speaking with intense feelings, Tia walked into the room and sat down on the bunk bed.
Since there were two bunk beds in the cabin, I sat down on the bed opposite to Tia and listened to what she had to say.
"Help huh—So Tia, you've guessed to some degree... what Mitsuki is intending to do."
I sighed heavily.
I had already told my companions about what had happened before and after Mitsuki flew away. Of course, that also included what Vritra told me about "saving the world."
"Hmm... Vritra suggested using the power of Code Lost to kill Mitsuki after she absorbs all of the dark matter, right? Since Mitsuki left immediately after that, she must have heard Vritra's conversation with you. Mitsuki probably... she definitely thinks *she is capable of carrying it out herself*."
Tia voiced what I was thinking.
Indeed. This was the most important reason why we must hurry to Mitsuki's side immediately.
"That's right. I've passed a part of Code Lost to Mitsuki too, but her share is much less than mine or Ariella's... Even so, although she can't use it to interfere in other people's destinies... *She might be able to use it to kill herself*."
A small part would be enough for her to gain a slight upper hand in combat against humans.
However... It was much easier for individuals to alter their own fate. For example, people could destroy themselves just by taking a step from a great height.
Hence, I was very worried whether Mitsuki was going to commit suicide.
Seeing my feelings for her change would be worse than death—Mitsuki apparently told Iris something like that. In that case... Chances were high that she had chosen the worst possible move.
When I clenched my fist, Tia leaned forward to hold my hand.
"Relax, Yuu. The last unknown territory remains. Maybe Mitsuki might get there faster than us, but she'll probably get blocked by the mist."
"...Mist?"
I frowned in puzzlement. Next, Tia took out her portable terminal and showed me the screen.
Displayed there was a swathe of white mist on top of the dome-shaped unknown territory.

"This photo was taken yesterday... Now it's like this."
Tia swiped her finger on the screen to reveal the next photo.
It should be the same place, but the unknown territory's black dome was no longer visible. It was completely covered by the white mist. No, it was more like a cloud than mist.
"This... What the heck is this? It doesn't look like normal clouds or mist."
I gulped and asked.
If I remembered correctly, the unknown territories reached a height of 150 kilometers. It would be quite weird for mist to form at that altitude, while covering the huge dome did not seem coincidental.
"Yes, this must be a 'true dragon'."
With a stiff expression, Tia nodded.
"Like Bahamut and Nyarlathotep, it came out from the unknown territory...?"
Major Loki had already pointed out the fact that each of the unknown territories contained a different "true dragon." However, this was a prediction that I had hoped to be wrong.
"Probably. Although it can't be confirmed just from images, this should be the third dragon, 'True Obliteration' Ragnarok. The Akashic Record has an entry on Ragnarok being a mist-like 'territory' that devours Earth's astral lifeforms."
"Ragnarok... Another pain in the ass, huh?"
I frowned, lowered my head and commented under my breath, but Tia shook her head hard.
"Don't worry. 'Gold' Phoenix was the counterdragon that defeated Ragnarok. Its successor was 'Yellow' Hraesvelgr, whose authority—Ether Wind—is currently held by Yuu."
"Really...? So having Ether Wind is enough to fight Ragnorak, huh?"
I exhaled in relief.
Just as we had defeated Bahamut using Iris' Catastrophe and Nyarlathotep using Shion's antimatter, there were authorities for countering respective past dragons. Conversely, it seemed impossible to defeat them without the corresponding authorities.
"Yes, Yuu will be able to break through that heavy mist, but unable to use Ether Wind, Mitsuki will be impeded. However..."
Nodding, Tia showed unease on her face.
"Does something worry you?"
"...A bit. Gravitational anomalies were detected in the vicinity of the third unknown territory that had disappeared. It must be 'Heavy Tremor' Nova, the fourth dragon. Mitsuki shouldn't have an authority able to oppose Nova... But she still managed it. So maybe this time..."
Unsure of herself, Tia brought up a potential problem.
It looked like we could not relax too much.
"Then I guess we'd better hurry after all. Also, what's the authority for countering Nova?"

I checked with Tia just in case. If it really came to that, the more information I had the better.
"Nova was defeated by 'Silver' Tiamat—the counterdragon which Kili named Tia after. Tiamat was succeeded by 'White' Leviathan, whose authority was antigravity. This too is held only by Yuu."
Indeed, I had not passed antigravity and Ether Wind to my companions. In other words, Mitsuki had gotten past Nova without using an authority. In that case, chances were not zero for her to conquer Ragnarok too.
"Assuming Mitsuki did not deliver a decisive blow, it's possible she found a way to bypass Nova to take care of the unknown territory directly. In that case, it's possible that Nova is still intact. We need to take precautions. Also... About the 'true dragons' appearing one after another..."
With some surprise in my voice, I sighed and spoke.
The third, the fourth, the fifth and the sixth. Four dragons had apparently emerged from the unknown territories already. In addition, operating the *Naglfar* was the machine intellect that used to manage Atlantis. Like a fairy in appearance, Atla could be considered the second dragon itself, "Ultimate Wisdom" Atlantis.
The eighth dragon was us, mankind, so that ruled out another dragon that had yet to appear.
"That just leaves the seventh, huh..."
Hearing my muttering, Tia said:
"Number one, the first dragon—'Hell' Gehenna—is an umbrella term for external foes that had arrived to this world, so its meaning is different from the rest. Hence, what needs special attention is the seventh—"
At this moment, Tia made a serious expression and went silent.
"What's the matter?"
"Tia... thought long and hard. But Tia still can't understand. Only during the seventh calamity that had attacked the world, the seventh dragon —'Disasterification' Apocalypse—were things a bit strange."
Seeing Tia tilt her head with a troubled look on her face, I encouraged her to continue.
"Strange in what way?"
"Because Neun's authority, capable of sealing away end matter, should be effective against Apocalypse too. But why the decision to let the world get destroyed, then restore everything using dark matter? ...Tia can't understand at all."
Looking straight up at me, Tia posed her question.
Now that she mentioned it—It definitely did not feel right.
"Although the reason is unknown, perhaps it had to be done... Or there was no other choice..."
I replied while I thought. Tia nodded vigorously.
"Yes. Tia is very intrigued too, unable to tell which case it is. Although the Akashic Record has a lot of data... It doesn't show how the 'world' thinks.

But... If the seventh is the reason... for why Neun's authority must be the ninth—"
Holding her head, Tia thought for a while, but then she plopped down on the bed, apparently at her limit.
"No more... Too much thinking will make my head explode."
On closer examination, I saw electricity flashing around Tia's horns. Her face was quite red too. Perhaps she had been using Yggdrasil's power to model all kinds of possibilities.
"Are you okay?"
I frantically moved to Tia's side and placed my hand on her forehead.
"—It's hot. You pushed yourself too far. If you ruin your health, we'd have an even bigger problem."
I sighed and reminded her.
"Yes... Sorry. But Tia will be fine after a bit of rest... Don't worry."
"I hope so—But if your temperature doesn't go down, you need to tell the others."
I was planning to go to the bridge to get updated, but thanks to Tia, I now had a grasp of the situation.
It was now fine for me to keep Tia company until the others got up.
"Yuu... Sleep and stay with Tia for a while. If you do this, Tia will recover very quickly."
Tia placed her hand on top of mine and firmly made her request.
Normally, she would be more direct, I guess. Although there was an element of demanding me to indulge her, she was currently shadowed by doubt too.
Perhaps she felt guilty for being selfish when Mitsuki was in a very bad situation.
However, Tia had made an unreasonable request only because she had done all that for Mitsuki's sake.
"Got it. Only thirty minutes, okay?"
Tia was delighted. Then I lied down next to her. Although the bed was quite narrow, it did not feel cramped because Tia was quite small.
"...Yuu, thank you."
Blushing, Tia hugged my arm. Warmer than my own temperature, Tia's body felt very soft with a mild sweet fragrance in the air.
At extremely close distance, her innocent face was making my heart race.
Because she definitely looked tired, I calmed down my heart while resetting my alarm.
I was a little sleepy too. I'd probably fall asleep immediately if I allowed myself.
"I'll wake you up when it's time. Get some good rest."
When I patted Tia on the head and said this, she smiled happily and nodded, then closed her eyes.
Feeling Tia's body warmth and faint heartbeat, I consciously allowed my body to slip into a state of sleep.

However, well—I should have been more determined back then.
Going back to sleep would often lead to unexpected developments. There was also the possibility that Tia might cancel the alarm—
——
——……
I probably did not dream this time. Due to the reassuring body warmth beside me, I simply slept soundly.
But later on, I felt heat. Breathing also became very difficult.
Was this what people called sleep paralysis? Lying there, I thought that then opened my heavy eyelids.
Next, pale skin—A massive bust was spread across my field of view. I could not help but hold my breath.
"What..."
I moved my head. Tia was still asleep on my right. However, someone also seemed to be sleeping on my left, her pale and soft chest pressed to my face, her legs entangling me tightly.
Her collar was wide open. I inhaled and a milk-like fragrance expanded in my nose.
Figuring out the situation, my heart began to race while blood rushed up to my face.
Who on earth was this? I forcefully changed my posture to secure my field of view.
—Well, I had a hunch alright.
Sleeping with her bust pressed tightly against my head was a silver-haired girl—Iris Freya.
"Nnuu…… I'm…… sorry…… also…… Mitsuki-chan…… sorry……"
What kind of dream was she having? Iris was talking in her sleep with a pained look on her face.
She must be blaming herself for failing to convince Mitsuki to stay.
However, a more pressing concern was figuring out why on earth Iris was here.
Well—I guess she came over to wake me up. Then she joined us in sleeping in. However, the problem was that it was *time for Iris to get up*.
I used my only free hand, my left, to reach out and find my portable terminal to check the time. Then I discovered it was long past the time I had set for the alarm.
It was nearly time for when the ship was expected to arrive at the Atlantic unknown territory. Almost time when I must head to the bridge for a strategy meeting.
"Iris, Tia, time to get up."
I called out to the sleeping girls.
"...Mononobe."
"Yuu..."

The two of them moved but for some reason, hugged me even tighter.
Feeling the soft and warm sensations even more clearly, my heart race even faster.
"Hey, it'll be bad if we don't get up! Wake up now!"
Unable to move, I frantically shouted at them.
—Knock knock.
In this kind of situation, I heard knocking at the door to my cabin.
"Mononobe Yuu, how much longer do you intend to sleep?"
Lisa's voice. She came at such a bad time—My mind blanked out and forgot to answer her.
"Goodness gracious… I am opening the door now."
"Oh—"
I wanted to stop her but it was too late.
Entering the room, Lisa looked at the lower bunk, staring at me, Iris and Tia, crowded on the narrow bed.
"……Enjoying yourself early in the morning, Mononobe Yuu, I see."
Lisa greeted me sarcastically when our gazes met.
"Y-Yeah… I suppose. But there are many reasons or should I say a lot happened—"
"Spare me your explanation, listening to it will just give me a headache. More importantly, you had better get up and make yourself presentable. The strategy meeting will begin at the bridge in ten minutes."
Lisa raised a slim and beautiful finger to poke me in the forehead, then sighed in exasperation.
"—I-I understand. I'll be ready right away."
Nodding at me, who was definitely in the wrong, Lisa left the bedside and turned her back to me.
"If being alone makes you uneasy… I-It is fine for you to come find me too, you know?"
"What did you say?"
Surprised by what she said to me without facing me, I could not help but exclaim.
I was expecting to be scolded, so it took me a while to understand what she meant.
"N-Nothing at all!"
However, Lisa quickly left the cabin without explaining.
I only realized the kindness and meaning in her words later when Tia and Iris were rubbing their eyes, getting up.

Part 6

"...In other words, the mist covering the unknown territory is the third dragon—'True Obliteration' Ragnarok—and 2nd Lieutenant Mononobe possesses the means to counter it?"
At the bridge where everyone had gathered, Major Loki spoke softly with his hand against the corner of his mouth.
Displayed on a monitor was the dome of mist that Tia had shown me earlier.
On one end of the screen, the fairy-like Atla was imitating Major Loki's pose.
"Then you should hurry. The signal from the portable terminal carried by Mononobe Mitsuki had stopped three hours ago at the location of the mist. She presumably went in."
Pointing at me, Atla spoke assertively.
She was very right. After listening to Tia, I had planned to do the same.
But I was not the only one here.
By sharing information Tia had obtained from the Akashic Record and data that NIFL had collected, everyone in Brynhildr Class were racking their brains to think of solutions.
"Please wait. Even though Mononobe Yuu, with his ability to use Ether Wind, is the most suitable candidate to send out, having him go alone would be too risky."
The first to speak out was Lisa, but a troubled look appeared on Shinomiya-sensei's face.
"No, those without the ability to oppose Ragnarok would only end up as unnecessary sacrifices if they accompanied him. As Midgard's commander, I cannot authorize anyone apart from Mononobe Yuu to enter. The others will provide full support from outside the mist."
These words were irrefutable, but Ren spoke up then.
"Then... It's fine as long as we can use Ether Wind."
On the side, Ariella was surprised by Ren's suggestion.
"As long as we can use it—Oh, don't tell me..."
Ren nodded deeply at Ariella, who seem to have figured out something.
"Mm. Correct—like before, pass on the authority."
Ren glanced at Major Loki before speaking.
Oh right—I had definitely passed on an authority before.
Using the connection between those of the same kind, I had divided Code Lost, which was impossible for me to hold alone, and shared it with Iris and the others.
By doing the same thing, perhaps all of us would be able to use Ether Wind.
"Passing on an authority, huh... How convenient, when gathering and inheriting Code Lost had essentially required people to die..."
Listening intently to our conversation, Major Loki muttered in surprise.
Shinomiya-sensei also spoke with interest.
"If you are able to do that among yourselves, that would be an effective solution indeed. Give it a try—"

"Wait. Even though this isn't a bad solution, I think it's very dangerous to split an authority without further thought."
Asking us to wait, Kili looked at Iris.
"Do you remember the battle against Bahamut? In the beginning, firing normal Catastrophe did not work. Only when Iris-chan seriously used the original Catastrophe was Bahamut destroyed completely. If recklessly splitting an authority weakens it too much, we'll be in trouble if things don't go our way. So—"
Sweeping her gaze across all of us with a critical eye, Kili then continued:
"Passing on the authority should be restricted to a small number of us with excellent combat skills. Assuming everything apart from Ether Wind is ineffective, it would be best to pick those who don't rely on dark matter or other authorities. In light of this condition—me and her would be enough."
Saying that, Kili pointed at Ariella, whose combat skills were highly adept even against human opponents.
For the vast majority, the combat power of Ds primarily relied on dark matter generation, but Ariella was very strong even without using transmutation. Purely in terms of anti-human skills, she was at least my equal. Fighting while enveloped in Ether Wind, Ariella's combat skills would definitely get to shine.
"Giving me Ether Wind..."
However, Ariella murmured with a conflicted expression.
Seeing her not particularly enthusiastic, I remembered.
Her family's souls had been eaten by Hraesvelgr. Perhaps she would feel reluctant to accept this authority.
"No need to force yourself, okay?"
But when Kili asked in a taunting manner, Ariella gritted her teeth hard and shook her head.
"No—since we're going with Mononobe-kun, I will go."
Hearing that, Ren held Ariella's hand from the side.
"Onee-chan... Onii-chan will be in your hands. I don't know how to fight without using dark matter—So I'm counting on you, Onee-chan."
"Yeah, leave it to me."
Smiling confidently, Ariella nodded at Ren.
"I wish I could come along, but this time, I can only hold the fort here..."
Firill slumped her shoulders in disappointment. Iris and Tia also nodded helplessly.
"I don't want to get in Mononobe's way... So I'll wait outside. But if there's anything I can do, please tell me! If it's for Mitsuki-chan, I'll do whatever it takes!"
Iris clenched her fist and declared.
"Do your best... Yuu. Although Mitsuki is so scary when she's angry, she makes yummy snacks sometimes... She also gives praise when Tia studies hard. Also, she's husband's little sister... For Tia, she's a precious little sister too!"

Tia gave encouragement with her own sentiments. Even though Mitsuki would surely object to certain parts of what she said, I simply patted Tia's head without correctly her.
"Yeah, I'll bring her back for sure."
I promised. Next to me, dressed in a male uniform, a platinum blonde—Jeanne Hortensia—looked agitated.
"...I am not a D, so I cannot accept your authority even though I have combat skills. It truly frustrates me that I cannot be your main support, Captain."
"Don't dwell on that, Jeanne, stay by Shion's side. Is she still sleeping?"
I looked around the bridge then spoke to Jeanne. Shion was not present. Shion had been sleeping ever since the Bahamut battle ended. Perhaps it was not simply due to exhaustion. It would be best for someone to watch over her.
"Very well... Understood."
"I have to stay back too. 'Tis such a bore."
Hanging around by the wall, Vritra whispered in irritation.
Everyone apart from Kili and Ariella accepted their assigned post to stay back. However, Lisa objected with strong determination.
"Please wait. I must go along with Mononobe Yuu. There is a mountain of words that I must say to Mitsuki-san. Recently, I have been training in martial arts and spear skills in order to handle every kind of situation. I shall not allow any of you to stop me."
Hearing this, Kili stared at Lisa with a frown.
"Honestly, this worries me a bit. The authority shouldn't split any further... Oh well, Yuu can make the call."
She shot a gaze of "what are you gonna do?" at me. I spoke:
"The goal of this operation is to bring Mitsuki back. I think Lisa is essential to achieving this. Lisa is probably the only one who can scold Mitsuki and make her come to her senses."
Saying that, I smiled at Lisa. With a stern expression, she nodded.
"That is indeed the case. Mononobe Yuu—Thank you."
"Hmph, is that so? Oh well, I have no complaints if Yuu says it's fine. Anyway, this conversation is over."
Kili looked dissatisfied, but she still accepted Lisa joining the operation. However, an unexpected voice was heard.
"Who says you can decide to end the conversation whenever!? You people forgot the most important thing! If you are going to that place, you should be bowing down to beg me for help!"
The one speaking was in the bridge monitor, staring at us with a pout. Seeing Atla like that, Major Loki smiled wryly and said to us:
"—2nd Lieutenant Mononobe. Whether or not you bow down, I leave that for you to negotiate on your own. However, there is no downside to bringing Atla to the battlefield."
"...Why should I take you, Atla?"

I shot a gaze of surprise at the machine intellect whose virtual avatar resembled a fairy. Appalled, she replied:
"Uh... Are you saying you failed to notice!? Hey, you! As the rubbish tree's successor, you should know what place the final unknown territory sits on!"
Saying that, Atla stared at Tia. However, Tia cocked her head in puzzlement.
"What place... What do you mean? Tia has no idea at all. Even if the Akashic Record has information, Tia doesn't know without a proper search."
In response, Atla shouted in fury:
"Arrgggh, I have had enough, this is why I hate the rubbish tree! The region of the mist and the unknown territory is where the Atlantis continent used to be! Without any intel on how things have changed inside the mist, it would be best to bring me, the one who managed and operated Atlantean civilization!"

Chapter 2 - Ragnarok of True Obliteration

Part 1

Approximately three hours prior to the arrival of the *Naglfar*—
In the center of the southern Atlantic, the unknown territory with a diameter of 300 kilometers, having swallowed a portion of the South American continent, was covered by thick mist.
Two girls were looking down at the scene from the air.
"It is impossible to see inside at all..."
Having arrived with the fake Shinomiya Miyako at the final unknown territory I—Mononobe Mitsuki—murmured as I looked at the mist blocking our path.
Calculating from the fact that its range was large enough to cover the unknown territory completely, the mist had probably surpassed a diameter of 400 kilometers. No matter how hard I focused my gaze, I still could not identify the black dome that was supposed to lie under that thick mist.
"You're right. It's too dangerous. Let's not enter, okay?"
Miyako-san asked me in jest.
"No, I have no intention of stopping at this point. I will only go forward. The question is you."
"Me?"
With slight anxiety, I voiced my doubt to Miyako-san who had cocked her head in puzzlement.
"After this mist is eliminated, I will be able to make contact with the final unknown territory... When that happens, will you still remain on my side?"
Facing the dome of mist, I glanced sideways at Miyako-san who was hovering beside me.
"Of course. Didn't I say I was going to help you, Mitsuki?"

She nodded without hesitation, the iridescent halo glowing over her head. This was the power of "Heavy Tremor" Nova—presumably an ability to interfere with gravity.
"But that only applies while our interests are aligned, right? Although I doubt you would answer honestly... Let me still pose the question. At which point in time will we no longer be on the same side?"
During the moment of becoming enemies, or the instant just before that, the side that made the first move would obtain victory. Hence, that point in time would be the most crucial question between us.
"Hmm... How should I put it...? Probably at the very last moment. Until you seal the unknown territory ahead of us into your own body—It would be a problem for me if you committed suicide while carrying the end matter."
Miyako-san answered with levity in her voice. Realizing she had seen through my intentions, my body tensed up violently.
"Then you will kill me before I commit suicide?"
I spoke with a heavy voice. Although the end result was death either way, the end matter would not be destroyed unless Code Lost was used.
However, for some reason, she gave a look of incomprehension then suddenly laughed out loud.
"Ahaha‐Why do I have to kill you, Mitsuki? Clearly, all I want is to stop you from dying, which is why I plan on stopping you from committing suicide."
"Uh... Meaning that you will not be troubled by the destruction of end matter?"
Confused, I asked again. It felt like we were speaking past each other. Miyako-san practically sounded like she was here to help me.
"Hmm, of course that would trouble me... But you're the most important, Mitsuki. So after sealing the final unknown territory, gather everything together and hand it over to me. No—ultimately, it's still a question whether you can contain all that end matter, Mitsuki. If possible, you should hand it over now. With that, I can take care of all kinds of problems on your behalf. At this point in time, Mitsuki, you still have several options."

Miyako extended her arms towards me and smiled gently. Unable to see any dishonesty in her smile, I felt my heart wavering, but after warning myself, I glared at her.
"Who would believe that! Although I have no idea what you are planning, I will fulfill my objective at all costs."
After I declared assertively, Miyako-san lowered her hands with a slightly sad look.
"...Indeed, well, it can't be helped right now. However, I will definitely convince you, Mitsuki, whatever it takes."
"I will destroy you first if you try anything weird."
Feeling a sense of crisis, I raised my left hand and warned.
However, I was feeling worried inside, wondering if Neun's authority would be effective against her. Suppose she was not merely a shadow generated from end matter, but also the physical manifestation of Nova the "true dragon," there was no guarantee that Neun's light alone could seal her.
"I think that would be ill advised, you know? Without my help, this mist —'True Obliteration' Ragnarok is probably impossible for you to breach."
Miyako-san answered with a confident expression without showing any signs of fear.
I could not tell if it was because the truth matched my speculations or the reason she had given.
However, no matter what, I must listen to her suggestion.
Because several hours ago, when I sealed the unknown territory in North Africa, I could not even approach without her neutralizing the gravitational field. It was likely she might not be bluffing this time either.
"...Understood. Anyway, I shall reconsider after looking into the mist."
When I lowered my hand, Miyako-san took my hand and pulled me.
"Okay—Then let's hurry and charge in. Mitsuki, do not separate from me under any circumstance."
"Kyah—"
Holding hands, we charged into the pure white wall of mist.
I broke out in goosebumps from the icy mist touching my skin. Breathing in cold wind, I shivered uncontrollably.
I could not see anything. It was like being inside a cloud.
I wondered whether the view would persist until I reached the unknown territory, but the scenery broadened after that.
Apparently, only the surface layer of the mist was especially thick.
Inside, the mist was of variable consistency. In directions of relatively thin mist, I could even see a gold color in the distance. But precisely because of that—because I could see—I gasped in surprise.
"This... was supposed to be over the sea."
I murmured with disbelief.
Glimpses of streets were visible in the mist. There were many damaged buildings. Their designs were quite strange, never had I seen the likes of before, but this was definitely a city.

Furthermore, there were large creatures, unlikely to be birds, flying in the air over town. Upon closer examination, there seemed to be something moving in the streets too.
"What on earth..."
While I was puzzled by the unclear situation. One of the flying entities in the sky flew over.
Once it had approached, I was struck by its immenseness.
With the head of a bird and the body of a lion, massive wings on its back—
This reminded me of the monster known as the griffin, which had appeared in the video games my brother used to play.
"—Brionac!"
Letting go of Miyako-san's hand, I readied my fictional armament of a bow.
"First Arrow, Fork Wind!"
I fired countless forking arrows of wind at the approaching monster.
However, instead of being struck by the invisible arrows, the monster continued to move in our direction without any change.
At this time, I noticed. The griffin-like monster was a bit transparent.
—Incorporeal? Could it be that the attacks passed through—
"Mitsuki!"
Grabbing my hand while I was stunned, Miyako-san flew towards the ground.
The monster flew past over my head, the strong wind in its wake blowing my hair to disarray. Despite its transparency, it did not seem to be an illusion.
"What exactly is—"
"Probably an extinct astral lifeform that had been devoured by Ragnarok a long time ago. Since this place is something resembling Ragnarok's belly, it comes as no surprise even if you find astral lifeforms that had been sucked in."
Miayko-san motioned with her eyes at the wrecked city below.
"A-Astral lifeforms?"
"Yes, which is why you'd better assume normal attacks are useless. But don't worry, my power interferes with space itself—"
Saying that, Miyako-san circled to the back. Failing to catch its prey, the griffin flew in a circle to chase after us.
Miyako-san extended her hand towards the griffin. Next, a gigantic iridescent halo appeared. The instant this rippling object spread throughout space, the griffin was suddenly sent flying.
While Miyako-san was showing to me what seemed to be a smile intended to inspire me with courage, she descended, rushing towards a round building whose roof was partially broken.
Receiving assistance and encouragement from an inevitable enemy, what on earth was I doing? I was following her pace the whole time, was I not?
Unless I seized initiative, everything would go as she wanted.

Feeling a strong sense of crisis, I tightly reciprocated the grip of Miyako's warm hand.

Part 2

"—Are you ready? I fear that wireless communications will be cut off once you enter the mist. If we do not hear back from your team after six hours, we will attempt to dispel the mist by attacking with the *Naglfar*'s weaponry. This could very well provoke Ragnarok, but our decisions will prioritize the rescue of your team. As such, you must put survival above all else."
"Yes, understood."
After listening to Shinomiya-sensei's voice from the communicator, I—Mononobe Yuu—gulped and replied.
Lisa, who was flying while holding my arm, as well as Kili and Ariella flying next to us, each responded on their respective communicators.
The *Naglfar* was moored five kilometers away from the dome of mist. Flying from there, we reached the boundary of the wall of mist.
Perhaps due to the mist, the air was very cold. This mist was apparently Ragnarok, but there were so signs of attacks mounting from within.
"Mononobe, be careful! Lisa-chan, Ariella-chan, I'm counting on you to take care of Mitsuki-chan. Kili-chan, I'm counting on you to take care of Mononobe."
Iris' voice was heard from the communicator.
"I will protect Yuu even without you telling me... But Iris-chan, why are you naming me in particular?"
Kili frowned and asked her communicator.
"Eh? Why...? It came out without thinking, I guess?"
"Sigh, fine. I accept, so don't worry. Very well, let's move out."
Kili sighed and replied to Iris then placed her hand on her left chest while staring at the wall of mist.
With the emission of golden particles, a faint glow surrounded her body.
The transfer of authority was completed like last time with Code Lost. By holding hands, using the connection from sameness of kind, Lisa, Kili and Ariella obtained the power taken from Hraesvelgr.
As a result, this was the glow of Ether Wind, the ability to materialize the spirit.
By consciously invoking the authority residing in the heart, we were able to use this power without needing dark matter as a medium.

The particle density was less than during that time in my fight against Major Loki, but this was probably due to dividing the authority to share out.
To be honest, myself included, none of us were confident about invoking this authority. When I used Ether Wind to turn myself into Hraesvelgr, I basically went along with survival instinct in a fatal situation, so I doubted that replicating the ability would be easy.
But unexpectedly, Kili found that it easier to use Hraesvelgr's authority than I had imagined.
Perhaps it was because the intended enemy of this authority—"True Obliteration" Ragnarok—was right before our eyes.
"Yes, ready any time."
Like Kili, Lisa easily enveloped herself in golden particles.
"……I feel reluctant using this power knowing it belonged to Hraesvelgr, but this is also the light that Mononobe-kun used to save me—So it's fine. I will use it too."
Ariella placed her right hand, clad in the gauntlet that was her fictional armament, on her chest and closed her eyes. Next, golden particles also appeared from her body and enveloped her slender body.
"Great, let's go."
I too focused my mind on the Ether Wind residing in my heart and released it.
Perhaps the nature of a counterdragon helped me. The golden particles naturally surged forth.
Using an authority caused one to become closer to being a dragon, for example, red scales appeared on Iris' skin when she used Basilisk's power, or how Shion was able to move her mithril hair due to inheriting the Kraken's power. And when using Ether Wind, the phenomenon of "dragonification" affected the spirit.
The spirit overflowed from the container, the physical body, then materialized by enveloping the body.
This was like the spirit coating around Hraesvelgr. Right now, the golden glow around us was our spirit, and this materialized spirit was moving the body it surrounded.
Prepared, we slowly entered the mist. Static appeared in our communicators and there was no response to our calls. As expected, electromagnetic waves were blocked and kept outside. I took off the communicator on my ear and placed it in a pocket.
Starting from when Ether Wind enveloped me, the cold sensation went away. Due to the mist's excessive thickness, visibility became extremely terrible very quickly.
To avoid getting separated, we flew closer together. While being transported, I focused my mind to observe if there was anything in the mist. Although there was a subtle feeling, it seemed to vary nearer and farther. This uncertain feeling made me break out with goosebumps all over.

The light of Ether Wind did not weaken in the mist, allowing us to see each other in this world of white.
"By the way—the way the body moves the instant I think it—this feeling is so weird."
Flying on the right, Kili moved her hand while murmuring with curiosity.
I knew the feeling she was talking about. Moving the body directly using the spirit as an external skeleton instead of relying on muscles, there was practically no lag between thought and action.
"I feel as though my strength has increased too."
Holding my hand while flying, Lisa moved her arm with amazement.
"There are repercussions if you act too reckless."
Because the physical body's specs had not increased, reckless action could cause muscle and bone damage, so I warned.
"Guys, the mist is getting thinner."
Ariella pointed ahead.
Just as she had said, the mist was decreasing in density—The field of view widened.
"This is truly... amazing."
Lisa sighed with bated breath.
Inside this space covered with light mist was a decrepit town. In the air above, creatures I had never seen before were flying back and forth.
Many of the buildings were built with curving outlines. Rather than modern, the architecture felt more like near futuristic. Were they in good condition, this would have made for spectacular scenery.
"I feel like I am lost, in another world..."
Looking around her surroundings, Ariella whispered.
"The strange creatures are probably the astral lifeforms Tia mentioned."
Looking at monsters flying in the distance, Kili commented in a stiff voice.
I thought back to what Tia had told us about Ragnarok.

'Ragnarok is a "world" that expands and maintains its existence by devouring other souls and spirits. Creatures that cannot survive independently as spirits end up dissociated into mist. However, high-level astral lifeforms are capable of maintaining their form inside Ragnarok. As a result, inside the mist, you will likely find creatures such as fairies or phantasmal beasts that went extinct long ago.'

Fairies, phantasmal beasts, demons, angels, elder gods—Supernatuarl existences from legends and fairy tales.
According to Tia, Ragnarok was the one that had annihilated all of these superior beings. Inside the mist, the "devoured" astral lifeforms would live on as part of Ragnarok.
In that case, the monsters far away—winged giant beasts and flying dragons—were astral lifeforms of this sort.
"Uwah, aren't they heading for us?"

Pointing at the monsters, Ariella cried out anxiously.
Indeed, the monsters circling in the air had changed trajectory to approach us.
"Although I would like to confirm if Ether Wind is effective against them... Fighting so many at the same time would definitely be a hassle."
Frowning, Lisa whispered. Kili looked at the wrecked town below and said:
"Let's hide in the ruins first and wait for the monsters to pass. It'd be bad if we carelessly started fighting and damaged Ragnarok's core, right?"
Ragnarok's core—This was also one of the major pieces of intelligence Tia had given us.
Before we set off, I had asked Tia how Hraesvelgr's predecessor, "Gold" Phoenix had used its authority to destroy Ragnarok.

'Phoenix flew into the mist, swallowing everything it caught, eating every astral lifeform inside. Losing its "inhabitants," the world could no longer sustain its form and the territory of mist gradually shrank. After Ragnarok's "supreme god"—the astral lifeform tasked with the responsibility of the core—was eaten, the world of mist collapsed... That was what is written in the Akashic Record. Therefore, destroying the core is enough to defeat Ragnarok. The most powerful astral lifeform should be the core.'

Tia had called the core the "supreme god." In other words, there were beings here that were so-called "gods." Once again, I was struck by what an unbelievable place I had entered.
However, according to Tia, destroying the core straight away would be too soon. We must bring back Mitsuki before defeating Ragnarok.
Unable to use Ether Wind, Mitsuki had no way of dealing with astral lifeforms and should end up stalled inside Ragnarok.
If they destroyed Ragnarok now, there would be nothing to hinder Mitsuki and she would arrive at the unknown territory first.
"Well, although I doubt the core is in this group of monsters, I agree with avoiding combat."
I looked at the approaching monsters and nodded.
The "supreme god" surely referred to something on a higher level, a god-like being. Although the approaching giant beasts and flying dragons looked very strong, they still felt somewhat different from gods.
"Well then, let us divert their attention then land immediately—Ash, screen out!"
Raising her fictional armament spear, Lisa declared sharply.
Immediately, projectiles of flame fired from her spear tip in all directions exploded in the air.
With thick smoke blocking the surroundings, the approaching monsters were engulfed in smoke.
During this time, I felt a tight grip on my hand. Then I descended together with Lisa. I looked up and saw Kili and Ariella following us.

Just then, I realized it would be bad in many ways to look up at girls so I frantically lowered my head. Of course, the smoke itself was quite dense, so I did not see anything I should not have—
"Over there should be fine."
Lisa found a building with a partially destroyed roof then entered it through the breach.
The instant we touched the ground, the floating sensation disappeared. Lisa and I had landed in a room inside the building. Soon after, Kili and Ariella arrived too. We looked around the dim room.
To be honest, it did not feel like a room at all.
There were the remains of dead corals and barnacles on the walls. Nothing remained of necessities one would imagine would be necessary for residents' daily lives.
"Looks like... It has been at the bottom of the sea for a very logn time. Ragnarok evidently blocks seawater in addition to electromagnetic waves."
Touching the uneven floor that was covered with shells, Lisa commented with rather deep curiosity.
"Rather than mist, it's more like a barrier isolated from the world. We've really come to a different world."
Carefully peering out of a window that no longer had glass, Ariella exhaled deeply.
"However, this city is not a part of Ragnarok, but existed at the bottom of the sea to begin with, right? If what 'she' said was true—"
Kili spoke with a hand over a corner of her mouth. Next, "the fifth member" entered the conversation.
'That is correct! This is the continent of Atlantis, sunken to the bottom of the sea!'
A shrill voice sounded from my chest.
Indeed, those entering Ragnorok was not just the four of us, me, Lisa, Ariella and Kili.
I took out a palm-sized portable terminal from my chest pocket. Instead of the ones distributed by Midgard, this was a Atlantean miniature computer created using data downloaded from the Akashic Record. Despite its small size, its processing power was comparable to NIFL's supercomputer. Running "her" required a computer with this level of specs.
"Atla, so this city really is where the Atlanteans lived?"
I asked the fairy appearing on the screen of the portable terminal—Atla, the machine intellect.
'Yes, this is the capital of Atlantis. Many humans lived here in peace. Until Kiskanu destroyed civilization...'
With intense rage, Atla replied.
After looking at the wrecked city for real, I began to understand a little why she called Tia, who had inherited the Akashic Record, the "rubbish tree."

Many humans had lived in this city, then virtually all of them perished. Because it happened so long ago, it did not feel real. Even so, I could imagine the kind of grudge Atla bore as the guardian of the city.
However, Kiskanu had met destruction and its successor, Yggdrasil, was under Tia's control. As such, Atla no longer had any target to vent her anger against except for Tia.
"But in hindsight, humans did not go extinct. And you came back to life too. So in away, I don't think you actually lost."
Patting Atla's head on the screen, I spoke to her.
'Hey... Don't touch me without permission! Even though I am a copy, I don't belong to you!'
Did she feel it because it was a touchscreen? Atla glared at me with her face red.
Just as she had said, this Atla was a clone of the machine intellect running the *Naglfar*. Because wireless communications was impossible inside Ragnarok, accompanying us was just a clone with all data copied to a terminal.
The original Atla remained in NIFL's supercomputer, operating the *Naglfar*.
"Okay, I get it. This is the historical site of the Atlantis civilization, so you made a special exception and agreed to come along with us. I'll be honest, the mist has made us lose our way, so it's really helpful to have someone who can provide a map."
When I thanked her, Atla on the screen puffed out her chest proudly.
'That's right, you can show more gratitude. I have already identified the current location. Let me display the map.'
The screen changed to show a map. On it, a red marker indicated our current location. The boundary with the outside world—the location of the wall of mist&mash;and the unknown territory's possible location were also displayed. Kili and the girls drew in closer and stared at the terminal from behind me.
"Heh... Let me see, with this, we won't get lost even if we use small alleys and paths."
While Kili murmured, Lisa pointed to an arrow indicating the direction of the unknown territory and said:
"We entered the mist at the point where Mitsuki-san's GPS signal ended. In that case, if we travel to the unknown territory from here, it should be highly likely for us to locate her trail."
Hearing this idea, Ariella chimed in as well.
"Then our next action is set. We will head for the unknown territory while staying vigilant against the monsters."
Although our discussion proceeded smoothly, I was stuck devoting all my effort to ignore the sensations on my back.
Everyone was looking at the terminal from behind me, which meant that certain soft and bouncy objects were pressing on my back.

However, now was not the time for pointing this out. In order to catch up to Mitsuki, we had no time for unnecessary things.
"We will move along the ground in places where there are more monsters. In safer areas, we will catch up by flying close to the ground. Unable to use Ether Wind, Mitsuki-san ought to be moving while avoiding combat as much as possible. We should manage to reach her if we hurry."
After saying that, Lisa moved away from me. Evidently, she had not noticed her chest pressing against me. Ariella was equally clueless. I could not help but mentally sigh.
"Fufu, how was it? Did it feel good?"
However, Kili spoke to me when getting off my back. She did it on purpose, apparently.
Although I hoped she would consider the situation when doing such things, I could clearly see the confidence in the way she spoke. Hence...
"—I don't know what you're talking about. Let's hurry and move out."
After saying that with a stern expression, I led everyone downstairs while holding the portable terminal in my hand.
Since monsters were probably still in the air, it would be best if we went into the street from the ground floor and advanced along the surface for a while. After all, there was no telling what kinds of astral lifeforms would show up.
No matter how many precautions taken, one could never be too careful.

Part 3

'Turn right at the next intersection.'
Listening to Atla's voice from the terminal, we followed minor roads to advance. Each of us was glowing faintly from the light of Ether Wind.
Like the interior of the building we were at earlier, the road surface was uneven, covered with calcified shells and coral.
Added to the fact that the buildings had curved designs, the roads were necessarily winding too. It was difficult staying oriented on roads that were not rectilinear. Without Atla, we would have gotten lost immediately.
I felt awed by the Atlanteans who were able to live well in such a city.
"Something huge is flying in the sky again."
Ariella advanced swiftly while paying attention to the sky.
Blocked by buildings, the narrow sky had multiple monsters flying past. Since flyers overhead produced shadows, we quickly noticed them.

"Don't worry, as long as we stick to small roads, we won't run into big monsters."
In charge of holding the rear, Kili spoke calmly.
Indeed, we had yet to encounter large astral lifeforms along the way.
However—
"Kyah!? Another one!"
Lisa screamed and grabbed my left arm. Her heavy bosom pressed tightly against me. I could feel the shampoo fragrance of her blonde hair tickling my nose.

"C-Calm down. Don't worry."
Losing composure for a different reason, I comforted Lisa.
What she was scared to look at was the mist hanging around the road side. When the wind blew, they would take on human appearances from time to time.
"Sheesh... You should get used to it by now. How many times have you already seen this? There are no signs of them attack anyway. Just relax."
Kili looked exasperated.
"Those are probably something like human souls. Unlike the monsters flying about in the sky, they have difficulty maintaining form."
Repeating what Tia had said, I looked at the mist that had become human figures.
Because humans were unable to maintain their existence without their physical body, they became mixed with the mist, wandering the streets in ambiguous forms.
We had brushed past them several times already, but they did not react to us, having probably their sense of self.
"I-In other words, they are like the souls of dead humans... Ghosts, essentially! Asking me not to be afraid is impossible!"
Avoiding the ghosts, Lisa pressed her forehead against my shoulder.
I remember there was one time when we visited a theme park in Japan. Lisa had also been super afraid in the haunted house. Back then, she hugged me tightly and I was totally drained from dragging her while I walked.
Seeing Lisa unwilling to relax her grip on me, Ariella sighed too.
"I understand how you feel, but you're going too far. The monsters in the sky are more dangerous, so it's risky if we let the ghosts draw our attention."
"Ariella-san... Aren't you staying close to Mononobe Yuu despite what you are saying?"
Lisa spoke with a look of disdain towards Ariella, who was sandwiching me from the other side.
Although she was not hugging me tightly, Ariella was clutching my right sleeve. Every time she saw a ghost, she shuddered.
"U-Umm—Umm, even though they're not dangerous, scary is still scary..."
Gritting her teeth to offer a contrived excuse, Ariella showed no signs of letting go of me.
"Sheesh... What is so scary about dead people? Their living counterparts are more troublesome and more dangerous."
With a look of incomprehension, Kili shrugged.
"I actually agree on this point, but considering the ghosts' true identity, I guess it's only natural to be afraid."
Passing by a ghost, I commented with poignancy.
"True identity?"
When Kili asked what I meant, I replied with a wry smile.

"If they're wandering this city, then it's highly likely they were Atlanteans, right? I totally cannot imagine what people living from so long ago were thinking or how they lived. It's only natural to fear things you don't know."
"If you don't know, why not ask her? The one in your hand."
Kili replied, pointing at the portable terminal in my hand. Loaded on this terminal was Atla, the AI that had managed Atlantis.
"Well, you're right... But maybe she doesn't want to recall these things."
While I was hesitating, the terminal vibrated then emitted a synthesized voice.
'I don't need you to overthink! I am not that fragile. Ask me anything you like!'
I looked at the screen to see Atla staring at me.
Apparently, my excess consideration had hurt her pride.
"Really? Then I'll try asking. There's a lot I'm curious about. First of all... Can I ask what the Atlanteans were like?"
"Almost the same as you people. But compared to modern humans, they had almost no vitality..."
Arms crossed, Atla spoke with nostalgia.
"No vitality?"
What did she mean? I frowned. Atla then spoke with an expression of mixed feelings.
"The people back then easily got sick. The birth rate was also extremely low. Despite advancing medical technology, the life expectancy kept shortening and the population shrank. Honestly, humans were facing a crisis of extinction. Trying to stop this was my biggest mission."
Looking like she was somewhat concerned about the ghosts we had just encountered, Atla sighed and continued.
"In fact, I believed humans could no longer survive when the Atlantis civilization was destroyed. Although data was left behind on stone slabs, I had no expectations. But when I revived, I discovered that humans were everywhere on Earth... It made me question what I had been doing. I felt a bit disappointed."
Although I wanted to comfort Atla, who was hugging her knees with a sad look on her face, I refrained because touching her would make her angry again.
"Anyway, humans lost their civilization but somehow recovered their vitality as a result of this—Something like that. Quite ironic."
When Kili concurred, not caring about the mood, Atla's expression became even more gloomy and she lowered her head.
"But well, even so, I don't think what you did was useless, Atla. Ultimately, without you, the humans wouldn't have arrived on Earth and we wouldn't be born. You're our savior—You could even say that we have to thank you for the fact that we can be here today."
I frantically added my opinion. Then Atla wiped her tearful eyes and looked up at me.

"I won't fall in love with you even if you come up with pretty words! What you say is beyond obvious!"
Finally recovered, Atla puffed out her chest on the small screen and replied.
"Excuse me... May I ask a question too?"
Just then, Lisa opened her mouth hesitantly. It looked like she had regained some composure now that we could not see any ghosts nearby. But even so, she still continued to hug my arm tightly...
"Fine, I allow it."
Atla spoke with an air of superiority, but Lisa was not offended. She asked:
"This city... This continent of Atlantis, why did it sink? One would expect the reason to be because of the fight against Yggdrasil—no, Kiskanu?"
Lisa looked down at the road surface that had merged with the remains of shells and corals. Frowning, Atla said gently:
"Hmm, I don't know either. The remnants of recovered memory only go back to the time shortly before Kiskanu wrought destruction... However, I can speculate. Underground of Atlantis are devices for supporting the entire city's functions. After I stopped operating, the unattended devices would have gone out of control and exploded."
"E-Exploded...?"
Lisa asked in astonishment.
"Yes. The underground structure would have been torn apart, resulting in the ground collapsing. From the fact that the buildings remained relatively undamaged, this must have happened gradually over a long period of time instead of suddenly."
Atla calmly offered her hypothesis without stopping.
After that, Kili interjected, having been silent until now.
"In other words, after Atlantis was destroyed, this city still existed on land for some amount of time. In that case, it answers one question."
I motioned with my gaze for Kili to explain herself.
"I've been wondering why the unknown territory and Ragnarok appeared here. After listening to what you guys said, I finally get it."
Touching a building's wall, Kili spoke.
Although there was damage to the houses lining the narrow and winding road, when taking into account the long amount of time spent sunk under the sea, this damage was quite minor. The wall's material seemed similar to porcelain, but it was probably a substance created using advanced technology.
"You think there is a definite link, Kili?"
I still did not understand. So what if this city had existed on land for a while?
"Yes. Having lost their science and civilization—I'm guessing not only physically but including memory interference like what happened to Yuu—the humans might have treated this city as a 'religious holy land' after they went back to primitive life. I don't know how astral lifeforms are produced,

but if there really existed an era when gods were around, this place, akin to a sacred sanctuary, would've been their residence, right?"
Digesting Kili's words in my mind took some time.
Not just the possibility she had pointed out, but the viewpoint that Kiskanu might have interfered with human memory also shocked me.
Indeed, as Kiskanu's successor, Yggdrasil had taken my memories as the price of our deal, allowing me to use authority. It would be possible to do the same to the Atlanteans, wiping knowledge of science and technology from their minds.
Following this idea, my thoughts went on a tangent. Next to me, Ariella asked directly.
"Umm, basically, after humans stopped living in the city, it might have become the place where things like gods or spirits lived... Is that what you mean?"
Kili nodded.
"That's right. If this became the most populous place on Earth for astral lifeforms, then it's only logical that Ragnarok descended upon here for food, right?"
"Well... I guess. Now that I think about it, this city and its inhabitants experienced a second extinction event."
Ariella looked around her with sorrow in her eyes.
Having experienced two tragic calamities and lost its inhabitants, this city was definitely deserving of pity.
But just then, humanoid mist appeared before them again. Lisa shuddered in fear, but she released me with determination then stared intently at the ghost.
"Lisa, are you okay?"
"...Yes. After listening to the earlier conversation, I feel more pity than fear. It would be too sad for them if we overreacted."
Saying that, Lisa lowered her eyes.
Next, another white shadow appeared ahead. Lisa's shoulder trembled slightly.
"I-I am fine if it is just one or two."
Although Lisa declared with resilience, humanoid mist appeared one after another on the curving road.
"Five, seven—no, more than ten!? Is... isn't this bad?"
Ariella entered a combat stance with a stiff expression. Lisa, Kili and I also stopped walking.
"This many is truly too much!"
Did she reach her limit? Lisa screamed and hid behind me.
Kili probably sensed a crisis too. Raising her hand in front of her, she entered an offensive stance.
"Although being formless, they can't attack... I have a bad feeling about this. They look like they're running away from something."
Just as she said, the shimmering ghosts approached us—then passed by us.

It was like something further down the road was chasing them.
Since the road was curved, we could only see ten-odd meters ahead of us.
But there was a sound—
I felt a chill down my back. Instinct was warning me and my body naturally entered a combat stance.
"—It's coming."
While protecting Lisa behind me, I bent forward, clenching my fists that were enveloped in faint golden light.
When the sound of footsteps and intense breathing reached my ears, a wolf-like creature rushed out from the far end of the road.
It was no ordinary wolf. That much was proven by the fact that it had two heads and the body was translucent. And there was more than one of them.
One after another, the ferocious beasts arrived, looking at us with their glowing eyes.
"The two-headed wolf is called the Orthrus, I think. Oh well, who cares... I'll just send it flying!"
At the very front, Kili shouted harshly then caused a huge explosion in front of the two-headed wolves. Orthus was a name that I too had seen in books and games before.
This explosion was achieved by spread tiny amounts of dark matter in the surroundings then transmuting them into heat. Kili's prided technique, Muspelheim.
However, the pack of Orthruses pushed the flames completely unscathed and charged us. No injuries. Neither did the blast blow them away. Rather than physical resilience, it seemed like the attack had gone through them completely.
"It failed!? Damn it!"
Kili greeted a lunging Orthrus with a roundhouse kick. Probably thanks to the Ether Wind enveloping her taking effect, the tip of her foot plunged deeply into the Orthrus' belly.
The Orthus wailed and collapsed on the ground. The pack behind it also stopped warily. Seeing them like that, Ariella stepped forward.
"Looks like attacks without Ether Wind won't work. But... If ordinary physical attacks don't work, then they can't damage our physical bodies, right?"
Keeping the Orthruses at bay with her glare, Ariella raised a question.
"Wanna try? Oh well, even if your body is fine, your spirit might get eaten, you know?"
Hearing Kili, Ariella frowned and shook her head.
"No thanks. These things were chasing the ghosts just now, which means they probably prey on human spirit for food."
Next, Lisa, who had been hiding behind me, stepped forward to stand by my side.
"In that case, we must defeat these monsters. Desiring food even after they are dead, they deserve no pity at all."

"Are we gonna fight?"
I asked worriedly. Lisa proceeded to nod with a determined look.
"Yes. There is nothing to be afraid of when they are simply monsters, not ghosts. Monsters that devour humans—obstacles hindering us from reaching Mitsuki-san—are unforgivable. I shall eliminate them."
Voicing her twisted logic matter-of-factly, Lisa glared at the Orthruses.
"—Don't overdo it."
"I know."
We exchanged a glance then kicked the ground. Kili and Ariella sprang into action at the same time.
With a roar from the leading Orthrus, the pack rushed over together.
—First one first. We must thin out enemy numbers before they surrounded us.
Capitalizing on an opening between the two heads, I pierced its throat with my hand. Wrapped in Ether Wind, my arms were unusually solid. I felt practically no resistance.
However, this thing had two heads. Killing one of them was not enough to stop it. The Orthrus attacked, aiming at my throat.
—What a pain.
I decapitated the other head with a karate chop, but taking care of one Orthrus had taken more time than I had planned.
The others looked like they were exerting too.
Kili aimed for a vital, but because the enemy had two heads, she could not kill it in one strike.
Using agile martial arts, Ariella sent Orthrus after Orthrus flying, but was pinned down by their superior numbers.
Lisa, the one whom I worried the most about, was using momentum from the charging Orthruses to throw them, then following up with attacks when they were off balance. Although she mentioned before she had been training in spear techniques, I could see that she had also taken part in aikido or something similar too.
However, it looked like she was still unable to deliver decisive blows to the Orthruses.
"Ah, Yuu—Look over here!"
While I was thinking we must find suitable tactics, Kili called to me.
I looked over to see Kili slicing through an Orthrus with a golden glowing sword in her hand.
"Kili, that's—"
She smiled at my surprise.
"I tried shaping Ether Wind into a weapon. Fighting this way is easier. Why don't you guys try it, using the same principle as constructing a fictional armament?"
Turning a part of our manifested spirit into a weapon—This had never occurred to me. Since Hraesvelgr had never attacked in such a manner, perhaps I gathered a preconceived notion that it could not be done.

However, since Kili tried it out for real, I gave it a try too. I focused my mind the same way as when I created my fictional armament gun, concentrating Ether Wind in my palm.
Next, the particles took on a gun's shape just as I had imagined. I aimed the muzzle at one of the Orthruses and pulled the trigger twice.
No sooner were shots heard than the released golden bullets pierced two separate heads squarely between their eyebrows. The Orthrus collapsed on the ground.
"Definitely, this is much easier."
This was probably a technique only actualizable by humans who would use weapons. I'm pretty sure it never occurred to Hraesvelgr to use weapons.
"Yes. I shan't lose now that I have a weapon!"
Lisa made a spear using Ether Wind, sweeping away multiple attacking Orthruses.
"Let's end this in one go, everyone!"
Holding a golden dagger, Ariella jumped into the middle of the pack of wolves and sliced apart the Orthruses surrounding her.
Since her fictional armament was a gauntlet, I seldom saw her wielding a weapon. This was probably the first time after our serious fight.
Strong as expected—Jumping and leaping, she chopped off monsters' heads.
Ariella could probably handle them all alone, but I continued to shoot and reduce enemy numbers. Wielding weapons, Kili and Lisa were also wiping them out.
"It feels so good to be able to keep chopping without needing to worry—But it's a bit boring without blood spurting."
Brandishing her sword with joy on her face, Kili commented excitedly.
"What is there to enjoy when taking lives!? Such complacency will make you careless!"
Lisa stabbed the neck of a leaping Orthrus behind Kili's back and brought it to the ground.
"...That being said, I was aware of that one, you know?"
"I had no intention of protecting you. I am simply defeating the foes in front of me."
While having this conversation, Kiil and Lisa exchanged a glance momentarily. However, due to many lunging Orthruses, they immediately stood back to back to face the enemies. From a bystander's perspective, the two of them seemed quite in sync. Despite many aspects of their personalities clashing, their fighting styles might be a good fit after all.
With the initial struggle seeming like a lie, we swiftly cut down the monsters.
In less than a minute, the pack of Orthruses were almost wiped out, leaving just one.
"You are the last one!"
Lisa stepped forward and stabbed.

Like a flash of light, the golden spear tip pierced the Orthrus from the front. Skewered right between the two heads, the monster struggled for a moment before turning into white mist and vanishing.
The carcasses lying on the ground also turned into white mist one after another, melding into the air.
"It appears that none are left."
After observing the surroundings warily, Lisa breathed out in relief.
"Although they aren't strong... It'd be a total pain if we keep encountering packs and packs of these things even when traveling on the ground."
Kili dispelled the Ether Wind sword in her hand and remarked with irritation. My decision to choose companions capable of close quarters combat turned out to be correct. However, recklessly getting drawn into battles again and again would tired us out.
"It looks like we can use the same way to take out the monsters in the sky. Let's switch to flying from now on. Well, there's an especially big one up above, but I'm sure we can find a way now that we are armed."
Ariella pointed up and suggested.
Just as she had pointed out, we could catch a glimpse of a monster through the gap between buildings. It was a giant winged dragon.
"Fine. Let me do it."
I nodded and raised the gun I had constructed from Ether Wind towards the sky.
"You plan on sniping from here?"
Lisa frowned and asked, prompting me to nod.
"That's right. It'll work as long as the bullet flies where I aim."
I narrowed my eyes and concentrated, waiting for the winged dragon to fly overhead.
Next, the prey appeared accompanied by the sound of wings flapping. The shadow fell upon the narrow road—Waiting for this instant, I pulled the trigger.
The golden bullet turned into a flash of light, piercing the winged dragon's head.
Without even a death cry, the winged dragon lost balance just like that and crashed down at us—But before it collided with a building, it turned into white mist.
"That's one point for me first."
I looked back at the girls. Lisa was looking at me shyly.
"...How amazing. You would probably win if you entered a marksmanship contest."
"Nah, I'd have no chance if Jeanne was there."
I replied with a wry smile. In marksmanship alone, Jeanne was unparalleled. There was an undeniable gap in accuracy between Jeanne and me.
"My eyes are opened... Then I shall find Jeanne-san when I learn marksmanship—Wait, now is not the time for idle chatter. Very well, let us continue on our way."

Apparently taking an interest in marksmanship, Lisa created her fictional armament then held out her hand to me.
Now that the winged dragon was eliminated, there should be nothing to attack us mid-flight for the time being. I nodded and was about to take Lisa's hand when Kili grabbed my hand from the side and took flight.
"You were the one flying with Yuu just now. It's my turn this time."
Kili told Lisa while ascending slowly.
"Hmm... Very well, so be it."
Lisa looked a bit displeased, but she did not object, following after us.
"Then after Kili, it'll be my turn. Holding Mononobe-kun's hand... I'm so nervous."
Enveloped in wind, following us, Ariella stared at her hand and smiled wryly.
Thus, we carefully flew out, above the roofs of the buildings. The unique view of the streets, filled with round buildings, leaped into our eyes. However, we could not see very far due to the mist.
"The unknown territory is in that direction!"
Atla pointed from the screen. When I showed Kili the terminal, she smiled and nodded.
"Understood. Let us move quickly before the monsters gather. Yuu—Hold my hand firmly."
Saying that, Kili weakened her grip on my hand for some reason.
"Hey—"
To avoid falling, I gripped her hand tightly. With a satisfied smile, Kili started moving.
"Good, that's the feeling. I always get so excited when you're forceful."
"...I really don't know what to say about your personality."
Holding on tightly, I sighed and replied.
Previously, Ariella had described Kili as masochistic, but I really had no idea how to classify this kind of behavior. Oh well, people can't be sorted into neat categories, I guess.
Unable to help with mobility in the air, I committed my attention towards monitoring our surroundings.
There were signs of winged dragons and giant winged beasts in the distance but they did not look like they were planning to fly towards us.
Of course, I did not forget about Mitsuki, the most important of all, so I paid attention to the situation on the ground too.
Signs of beasts appeared on the curving little paths from time to time.
There were enemies both on the ground and in the air, but Mitsuki was probably fine. Although it would be a problem if she reached the unknown territory first, I felt my anxiety surging at the thought of her being stuck in a desperate situation.
"Kili, please move as fast as possible."
I looked up at Kili in mid-flight and asked.
"Are you sure? You might miss her if we go too fast, you know?"

"Finding Mitsuki in such a big city will be very hard no matter whether we go fast or slow. It's better if we look for signs of combat. With so many monsters, I'm sure Mitsuki and the fake Miyako will end up stuck in a battle somewhere they cannot avoid."
Looking at the ruins of the Atlantis civilization, I answered.
Nearby, Lisa agreed.
"Even if we fail to locate her, so long as we reach the unknown territory first, we will be able to spread up and set up a perimeter. As such, I agree with moving faster."
While watching the sky for threats, Ariella nodded too.
"Even if monsters approach, we can rely on Mononobe-kun to shoot them down as long as they're not too many. Atla, how far away is the unknown territory?"
Looking at the terminal in my hand, Ariella asked.
"The mist covering the unknown territory extends roughly 50 kilometers. We have 39 kilometers to go. On foot, the complicated route will be quite long, but flying straight, you can reach it in less than fifteen minutes."
"Well, there probably will be things in our way, so it's not going to be that easy... But the fact that the unknown territory hasn't disappeared means that Mitsuki might be forced to travel on land. We should be able to beat her by ten minutes."
Ariella spoke in bright voice. I felt hopeful too.
But five minutes later, before we reached the unknown territory, some kind of anomalous scene entered our view.
The first to notice was Kili.
"What... is that?"
Continuing to fly at high speed, she pointed ahead.
On the ground was the strange urban landscape of Atlantis, but slightly further ahead, the streets changed completely.
There was a huge bowl-like hole on the ground, surrounded by collapsed buildings. It looked like something gigantic had stepped on it.
"Let us go down and investigate the situation."
We nodded to acknowledge Lisa's suggestion and landed on the ground depression that was filled with debris from buildings.
Walking over rubble and checking out the ground situation, we discovered a deep fissure. The shells and calcified coral covering the roads were also in disarray.
"No signs of erosion on the sides of the rubble. This... damage is recent."
Picking up a piece of debris, I spoke. Similarly inspecting the rubble, Ariella lifted her head and looked back and forth at the deeply sunken wasteland.
"Then could this be the result of a battle? Was Mitsuki fighting here...? But what could have caused this—"
"Let us discuss this later. It is possible for Mitsuki-san to be buried in the rubble. Let us first examine the depression and the surrounding area."
Interrupting Ariella, Lisa urged. However, Kili did not look motivated.

"Now that you've finally encountered a clue, I don't really mind if you want to investigate… But shouldn't we avoid separating?"
"Why?"
I asked Kili. Hearing that Mitsuki might be buried alive, I was about to rush out in a hurry.
"Yuu, calm down. Normally, you'd figure it out quickly. Unable to use Ether Wind, your sister has no means of killing the monsters here. If we're talking about her, rather than getting buried under rubble, wouldn't the inability to fight monsters be much more likely?"
"I-I guess you're right."
Noticing that I was losing composure from haste, I reflected on myself.
"Well, with Ether Wind at our disposal, there shouldn't be any enemy we can't fight. But just in case, let's stay in pairs. So Yuu and I will—"
"Going by sequence, it's my turn, right?"
Ariella cut in between Kili and me, then smiled.
"Wait a sec, that's just the order for taking Yuu flying—"
"Really? But I suspect you'll do something weird if we let you spend time alone with Mononobe-kun… If Mitsuki witnessed it, that'd cause unnecessary trouble."
Ariella responded to Kili with a look of distrust.
"A fair point indeed. Kili-san, you and I shall work together this time. Ariella-san and Mononobe Yuu will be responsible for investigating the interior of the depression. We shall circle the vicinity in the air. Do not spend too much time. Let us converge here again fifteen minutes later."
"D-Don't just decide on your own!"
Lisa grabbed Kili's hand from the side, dragging the complaining Kili, and flew into the sky. With both of them capable of flight taking responsibility for a wider area, this was a good judgment call.
Watching them leave, Ariella and I exchanged a wry smile before starting our search of the depression.
"—Mitsuki is nowhere to be found."
I nodded at Ariella who was murmuring with a tense expression.
"Yeah, but we can't lower guard even if we find her safe and sound. That fake Shinomiya Miyako is definitely by Mitsuki's side."
I replied while looking at the mounds of debris in the surroundings. Ariella gazed at her hand.
"Something born from end matter, right? Although it feels scary, if the enemy takes on human form, then Code Lost can be used. You and I, Mononobe-kun… can surely kill her."
"The enemy is not human, so don't take it for granted. Speaking of which, Ariella, you don't have to force yourself."
Ariella had always feared the power of Code Lost, capable of killing humans easily. Although her authority had transferred to me when I defeated her, during the redistribution afterwards, it returned almost unaltered to her again.

If Ariella saw defeating the fake Shinomiya Miyako as "murder," she would probably fail to go through with it.
"Thank you, Mononobe-kun, but you don't have to worry about me. I know. She is the devil who's been tempting Mitsuki the whole time. I haven't met her before, so I rationalize this. If it were my friend... I probably wouldn't be able to do it."
Saying that, Ariella smiled wryly.
Mitsuki, Lisa and Firill were the ones who entered Midgard at the same time as Shinomiya Miyako. Ariella and Ren had joined Brynhildr Class after Shinomiya Miyako's death.
As for me, I had only seen the manifestation of her "soul" through Ether Wind at the laboratory where the Kraken's remains were kept.
"If possible, I don't want to fight in front of Mitsuki and Lisa."
I prayed quietly.
Mitsuki seemed to know that Shinomiya Miyako was a fake, but probably had difficulty completely convincing herself.
Incidentally, I had a feeling that things wouldn't go that smoothly. After all, we still didn't even know if we could catch up to Mitsuki.
While walking on the rubble, I looked for clues everywhere. If there was something, it must be at the center of the crater, right? Ariella and I slowly went down the slope.
"Hmm, if possible, I hope we can be the ones to end things."
Ariella agreed with a determined voice while staying alert of the surroundings.
'Who will be the one to kill... Humans concerned about means are such a pain in so many ways.'
In my chest pocket, Atla's voice sounded from the terminal.
That reminded me, she was here too. Thinking this, I took out the terminal from my pocket and placed it on my hand.
"Well, but for us, it's not that easy to distinguish between means and ends until finally death is reached."
Even if ends were everything, there was more to come after achieving an end. The means arising from a certain end would be waiting. Hence, in order not to have regrets, one had to put in more thought, to accumulate decisions that were deemed the best possible at the time.
'The ability to continue calculating in spite of unsolvable equations, human processing power is quite impressive to me in some ways. If I were in your place, my brain would probably reach an error and explode.'
"Humans are surprisingly tough. So tough that they'd survive even if they must kill someone."
Smiling wryly at Atla's surprise and praise, I continued my search.
Although buildings were destroyed, there were large pieces of debris in the surroundings, indicating the presence of a large building in the past. Stout columns were piled up, fallen over on the ground, producing many dead ends.

To avoid sudden attacks, I focused my mind and sensed the surroundings. However—Even though I was on maximum alert, *this voice* instantly sounded from next to me.

"And here I was, wondering what you're chatting about. A discussion about killing me? Hello, dangerous people."

I gasped and jumped back. Ariella reacted at almost the same time. Appearing from behind a column was a girl with a face very similar to Shinomiya-sensei and Shion. Shoulder-length black hair, fluttering in the wind. She was smiling. I did not know if it was the effect of end matter, but her skin color was different from Shinomiya-sensei and Shion's, darkened like having a sun tan.
"The fake... Shinomiya Miyako, huh?"
I turned my sharp gaze at the thing with Shinomiyako's form. Perhaps because she was not alive, that was why I couldn't sense her presence.
"I can't believe you choose to appear before us. What are you planning by coming here?"
Instantly creating a knife from dark matter, Ariella lowered her stance and asked. The tip of that knife would instantly pierce where Shinomiya Miyako was standing, any time she wished to do so.
I too synthesized my fictional armament, the gun Siegfried, and prepared to take action any moment.
Although her goal was unknown, this was an opportunity.
Since we were surrounded by a coating of our spirit, manifested through Ether Wind, physical attacks were ineffective against us. Also, it was two against one, without needing to worry about Mitsuki and Lisa.
Now would be the time if we were to kill—
However, we did not take action. Shinomiya Miyako's calm expression made us wary.
"What am I planning, huh?"
Despite clearly sensing our intent to kill, Shinomiya Miyako leisurely pondered with arms crossed.
Then apparently coming up with the answer, she lowered her arms and smiled at us.
"Hmm—broadly speaking, I have had only one goal all along."
"One goal?"
Looking for a chance to strike, I asked.
"Yes. Me... All I want is to save Mitsuki. From the moment I met her, ever since—That is what I live for."
The instant she confessed, calamity struck.
"...Gah!?"
My body suddenly felt heavy. It was like being pushed down by an invisible hand.
"What—"

I heard Ariella's surprised voice.
Unable to stand, I fell on my knees. Looking up, I saw a rainbow-colored halo above Shinomiya Miyako's head. In her hand was a fictional armament in the shape of a pure-black naginata—No, since there wasn't a faint glow on the blade, that was probably a mass of end matter.
However, more than the sudden change, it was her expression that drew my attention.
Until just now, she had looked so calm and confident, but currently, Shinomiya Miyako was glaring at me with anger on her face.
"Please do not resist. It is too late to resist by now."
This was a deep voice filled with emotions surging from the heart.
Far too human—A gaze with mix of hatred, pain and sorrow.
Seeing this, a certain idea popped up in my mind.
No logic. No grounds. Purely instinct.
Even so, I could not reject the idea that my own mind had produced. My voice continued to echo in my mind.
—This Shinomiya Miyako could very well be the real Shinomiya Miyako.

Part 4

An hour prior to Mononobe Yuu and Areilla Lu encountering Shinomiya Miyako. In a wasteland inside Ragnarok—

"Huff... Huff... Huff..."
I—Mononobe Mitsuki—was panting, sitting inside a building I had sneaked into.
My legs were shaking, unable to even stand. My entire body was breaking out in cold sweat. My drenched clothing felt very uncomfortable.
"Hoo boy, that was so close. That thing was completely different from the other astral lifeform gods. Oh well, I did send it underground as much as I could, so it won't be chasing after us for a while."
Entering the building together with me, Miyako-san spoke in a cheerful tone of voice.
Despite saying it was "close," she had not sweated at all. Despite having run quite a distance, she did not seem tired in the slightest.
—Not human, as expected.

Although it was something I already knew about, after witnessing that immense power of hers, I began to fear her. Yet she looked so much like Miyako.
When looking at her, my heart would get all jumbled up, making it impossible for me to think, so I lowered my head.
"...Thank you for saving me."
In spite of everything, gratitude was warranted after all.
The astral lifeform we had encountered just now as clearly different from phantasmal beasts and monsters. Only through Miyako-san crushing everything in the area were we able to halt the enemy, allowing us to escape to here.
Perhaps that was a god from a bygone age.
"No need to thank me. All I want is to help you, Mitsuki, that's why I'm traveling with you. Well, however, if you feel grateful to me, I wish you'd listen to me more."
Miyako-san sat down right in front of me, speaking in a slightly sad voice. I looked up to see her staring at me with a serious gaze.
"Hey Mitsuki, could you stop trying to save the world by doing something ridiculous like killing yourself? If you do that, you're not going to gain anything, right?"
"……To me, living would be more painful. I am the happiest now as Nii-san's number one, hence, things ought to end here. Nii-san will never kill me to save the world, so this is what you call two birds one stone."
I voiced the conclusion I had reached when I learned "the method to save the world."
ALthough I had no need to find companions, perhaps because she resembled my dear friend so much in appearance, I could not help but talk freer.
"Then if you want to save the world, just pass all of the end matter to me. I will die in your place, if that's what you want, Mitsuki."
"Do you really think I will believe that?"
I answered with my eyes narrowed. She smiled wryly.
"Well, I am aware that I'm not that persuasive. But you could try trusting me. Suppose you lost the reason of 'saving the world,' then you won't want to suicide, right?"
"Well…… No, even without that, I will still—"
I thought briefly, then shook my head at this meaningless hypothetical.
Miyako-san sighed with surprise at my response.
"Man you are in deep. Do you really like your brother that much? From what I can see, he's just a shameful guy who has neither the ability to choose the one girl he likes nor the courage to reject girls."
I could not help but smile at the merciless criticism. Indeed, someone who did not understand Nii-san would might reach such a conclusion. But—
"Nii-san does not lack the courage to reject girls. No matter how strong her affection, if accepting a girl's feelings would lead to her misfortune, Nii-san

would give her a clear rejection, even if the girl had yet to confess. I have personally witnessed similar incidents many times."
Recalling the past during elementary school, I spoke. Nii-san might describe himself as unpopular, but he definitely acted with initiative back then.
Back in those days, Nii-san was taking seriously his promise to marry me in the future. But after that, he lost memories due to his deal with Yggdrasil and took on many burdens. But without courage, he never would have abandoned what he already possessed.
"For sure, Nii-san hopes that everyone dear to him can be happy. He is seriously thinking of bringing happiness to me, Iris-san and the others. To achieve this, the only way is to take responsibility for everyone who had turned into his mate."
I replied with confidence. I did not find Nii-san's choice to be shameful at all.
However, Miyako-san asked me with an unconvinced look.
"But with this, aren't you faced with misfortune then, Mitsuki!?"
Seeing her looking like she was about to cry, I felt my heart rend.
"...No, I am happy. Even if Nii-san had chosen me alone and distanced himself from the others, I would have done the same."
Once the Ninth Calamity was destroyed, *the Nii-san who regarded me as number one* would no longer exist. This was immutable. Even without any rivals, I probably could not come to accept this.
"Mitsuki, you're so stubborn. If you won't change your mind, I'll stop helping you, got that?"
"Suit yourself."
I did not back down. We stared each other in the eye.
I had already made my decision and had no intention to stop. Neither had I any intention to listen to her sweet lies.
"Are you sure? Without me, you have no way of handling astral lifeforms. You know that, right? No matter what path you take, you'll eventually run into them, so going it alone is not possible for you."
"Hmm.. Indeed, I have no means of opposing beast-like astral lifeforms. However, the one just now was an exception. So long as I choose my enemies, I will be able to break through."
After I answered in a firm tone of voice, Miyako slowly stood up expressionlessly.
"Is that so? Fine."
"Oh..."
Seeing her about to leave the building, I reflexively reached out—But halfway, I noticed it and stopped myself.
Yet even though my hand had not touched her, she stopped at the exit and looked back.
"If you've made up your mind to die, Mitsuki, I have my considerations too. I am going off to make preparations, don't strain yourself."

Looking at her eyes whose emotions I could not read, a bad feeling rose up in my heart.
However, before I could respond, she left the building. By the time I raced out frantically to chase her, she was already out of sight.
I hesitated whether I should go find her, but decided that the risk of encountering enemies on my own was too big.
There was no time for anything unnecessary. In any case, I must move forward—To achieve my objective.
Steeling my determination, I set off in what I believed was the direction of the unknown territory. Although the paths were winding, perhaps due to the end matter within me, I felt as though I was being guided.
Though I had no idea what Miyako-san was planning, all I needed to do was end everything before that.
The destination was near.

*

Flying off from Mitsuki's side, Shinomiya Miyako deployed a gigantic rainbow-colored halo around herself, speeding through the hazy mist.
Approaching astral lifeforms were sent flying before they could touch her.
Were she serious, getting to the unknown territory would be very easy too.
She had lent a minimum level of assistance to Mitsuki, hoping to buy time to persuade her.
However, no matter how she pleaded, Miyako still failed to change Mitsuki's mind. Hence, she must take a different approach.
With many things weighing on her mind, Shinomiya Miyako increased her flying speed.
However, she was not flying towards the unknown territory. She was going back the way they had come from.
Ahead of her was the boundary between Ragnarok and the external world.
A heavy wall of mist isolating a world.

*

White mist covered the unknown territory.
On the sea near the white mist, the NIFL battleship, the *Naglfar*, was moored.
"I wonder... if Mononobe has found Mitsuki-chan."
On the deck of the *Naglfar*, Iris Freya murmured, looking at the wall of pure white mist.
"Lisa is with him. Don't worry."
Leaning against the railing on the deck, Tia spoke up. Close by, Ren nodded too.
"Yes, Onee-chan is there too."
However, sitting on the deck, reading a book, Firill sighed lightly.
"It worries me that Kili is there too. I feel that she might say something unnecessary and rub Mitsuki the wrong way. I'm so worried that I can't even read anymore..."
Hearing that, Iris hurried over to Firill's side, clenched her fist and insisted:

"Kili-chan will definitely help Mononobe! She won't get in the way!"
"Why are you so certain?"
Firill asked in surprise, causing Iris to reply with a stunned look on her face.
"Eh? Why...? I don't think Kili-chan will want Mononobe to really hate her, right..."
Hearing this answer, Firill giggled.
"Fufu, now that you mention it—That's true. That mischievousness of hers, the tendency to bully those she likes... Perhaps that reminds me of a stray cat. But now, the impression is more of a dog now."

Wan!

"A dog?"
This time, it was Iris' turn to tilt her head in puzzlement.
"Kili is not a dog!"
Tia interjected with doubt on her face. However, Ren seriously made a correction.
"...Tia, that's a metaphor. I get it. The current Kili get overjoyed when Onii-chan asks her for help. She's a dog but in a different way than Jeanne."
Firill nodded contentedly after hearing Ren agree with her.
"Yes, that's it. If Jeanne is a loyal dog, then Kili would be a big dog that likes to seek your attention. Those two apparently worked together for a while, so they might be similar in nature."
"Firill... You mustn't repeat this before any of them."
Ren warned in exasperation. Firill suddenly looked back and forth across the deck then exhaled with relief.
"Great... We weren't overheard. Jeanne is with Shion, right?"
"Yes, Shion has not woken up at all, so she's very worried about her."
Ren replied. Iris also looked all over the deck.
"Eh? Vritra's gone too? We clearly came here together..."
"She got bored and returned to her cabin to sleep!"
Tia answered Iris' question.
"Well... There hasn't been any new developments after all. I can understand how she feels."
Smiling wryly, Firill looked at the wall of mist.
A sudden change—happened right then and there.
Suddenly, the mist expanded from inside. With a strange buzzing sound, a circular opening was gouged out from the wall of mist. After a while, a gust of strong wind blew towards the *Naglfar*.
"Kyah!?"
The book in Firill's hand was blown all the way to the door of the entrance.
"T-Tia is going to be blown away!?"
Desperately holding onto the railing, Tia screamed.
"Mm... What is going on?"
Lowering her posture to resist the strong wind, Ren looked at someting flying out from the hole in the mist and gasped.
What came out first was a rainbow-colored halo with a diameter of a few dozen meters. Shimmering like aurora lights, the halo had many layers. In the center, a girl was floating.
"Ah—That person is..."
Iris cried out and looked in Firill's direction.
Indeed, among them, Firill was the only one who knew "her."
"...Miyako."
Firill quietly spoke the girl's name. Iris and the others looked into the air with an "I knew it" kind of expression. Soon after Shinomiya Miyako and the multi-layered halo exited the mist, the hole was quickly filled in.
Vuuuuuuuuuuu...

The bridge had probably identified Shinomiya Miyako too. The sound of engine rumbling was heard from under the deck, accompanied by vibrations. The *Naglfar* started to turn around.
Loki Jotunheim's voice was broadcast outside the ship.
"—We will strike using the main cannon Babel Replica. To avoid the aftershock, everyone on deck must evacuate immediately."
"S-Suddenly attacking? Shouldn't we listen to her if she has something to say—"
Iris questioned, but Firill frowned and grabbed her hand.
"That isn't the real Miyako. It's something unidentified, created from end matter. Attacking is the right call. We too must fight."
Saying that, Firill generated her grimoire fictional armament, summoning wind to pull away from the *Naglfar*.
With the prow pointed at Shinomiya Miyako, the *Naglfar* began to hover. At the prow was a cannon whose tip was bifurcated. It glowed with blinding light from within.
"It's identical to Mononobe's anti-dragon armament..."
Looking at the *Naglfar*'s main cannon, Iris murmured.
"Well, it is a replica of Babel after all."
From the air looking down at the main cannon that was about to fire, Firill concurred.
More than just the main cannon, the entire ship was an anti-dragon armament created using Atla's data as the foundation and actualized using modern technology. It was only natural for the *Naglfar*'s Babel to be similar to Marduk's original.
"Count down initiated. Three, two, one—"
Loki's voice sounded, conveying the timing of the shot.
Despite being in the main cannon's line of fire, Shinomiya Miyako made no effort to evade.
However, just before the main cannon fired, the rainbow-colored halo disintegrated, fluttered in the air, then recombined in front of Shinomiya Miyako to form a shield.
"Zero."
A black flash was fired. This flash was a supergravitational discontinuity that devoured everything including light.
This destructive power, distorting space and putting cracks on the surrounding scenery, clashed violently with the rainbow-colored halo deployed by Shinomiya Miyako.
BOOM—
A ripple appeared in the world. The ripple spread through the air, causing the ocean surface to drop greatly.
The shockwave also reached Firill and Iris immediately. Their reinforced air barrier was blown away.
"She blocked it...!"
Watching the two powers clash, Iris exclaimed in surprise.

The supergravitational discontinuity had not struck Shinomiya Miyako. The rainbow-colored halo had stopped it.
However, it was not a balanced stalemate. Layer after layer of the multi-layered rainbow-colored halo became distorted, shattered then fell apart.
"No, the attack should be able to break through if it continued—But..."
Firill disagreed with Iris but made a pained look.
It was obvious from a glance. The halo barrier was quite thick.
Sure enough, before the entire halo was penetrated, the black light weakened and disappeared. It was either insufficient energy or the barrel had reached its limit.
"Hey, should Tia attack?"
"I am ready. Any time."
Tia and Ren approached, waiting for Firill's instructions. Realizing she was the oldest among her teammates here, Firill spoke with a stiff expression.
"Wait. Ordinary attacks probably won't work. We will scatter and from three different directions—"
But before she could finish, Firill noticed. Shinomiya Miyako was looking at them.
The rainbow-colored halo gathered over Shinomiya Miyako and contracted.
Looking almost like an angel with a halo, Shinomiya Miyako raised her hand.
Instantly, Firill and company experienced heavy weight.
"What—"
It felt like gravity had multiplied, causing their bodies to become heavy.
Unable to remain in the air, Firill and the others descended bit by bit, desperately using wind to slow down.
However, they were over the ocean. The only place to land was the deck of the *Naglfar*.
"S-So heavy, it hurts..."
Tia managed to land on the deck, but collapsed, unable to support herself.
"Tia-chan—"
Landing with Firill, Iris tried to get to Tia's side, but walking was difficult. Halfway, she had to crawl.
"The *Naglfar* is also... falling."
Landed on the edge of the deck, Ren looked down at the ocean and gasped.
The hovering *Naglfar* was being pushed down towards the ocean by an invisible force.
"What... is this? Miyako's power?"
Looking up at Shinomiya Miyako who had raised a hand, Firill wondered.
Next, she met gazes with Shinomiya Miyako.
Shinomiya Miyako smiled faintly then slowly descended to where Firill and the others were.
"Firill, it's been a long time. How are you doing?"
Smiling cheefully, Shinomiya Miyako greeted cordially.

"...Amazing. Really... Identical. But I know you are an impostor. Impostor... Stop acting familiar with me."
Despite her surprise, Firill glared at the Shinomiya Miyako who had landed within speaking distance.
"Indeed, I am an impostor. I am your enemy, born from end matter—remains that had met demise eons ago. However... In spite of that, I am still me."
With a mixture of laughter and sorrow on her face, Shinomiya Miyako raised her hand at the sky.
Next, a black sphere appeared parallel to her hand.
The sphere gradually grew big, forming a dark mass that did not seem three dimensional at all.
"Dark matter...? No, it's normally impossible to generate so much at once. Then could it be—"
Looking down at Firill, who was mustering all her strength just to look up, Shinomiya Miyako nodded.
"Indeed, this is end matter. This is the darkness when all life and matter reach their end. The 'Black Egg of Angolmois'—the realm of death thirsting for new life. This is the 'ninth calamity' seeking to destroy this planet. Unable to use your authority to its full potential, you lot have no way of countering it."
"...Angol... mois?"
Firill repeated the name with a frown. Shinomiya Miyako spoke with pity.
"That is the name of the world that will soon be born. However, that is irrelevant to you. Forget it."
"...You intend to kill us?"
Feeling the despair brought by the expanding dark mass, Firill asked hoarsely. But her question only caused Shinomiya Miyako to snort coldly.
"Kill you? Don't make me laugh. For us—end matter—what else could be more valuable than the living? As such... Absorbing you alive should be obvious."
The pitch black sphere arrived over the heads of Firill and the others. The darkness was descending like an avalanche.
"O catastrophe—Actualize!"
Iris suddenly released a red flash of Catastrophe towards the air.
It was a powerful authority, capable of penetrating time to weather away all creation.
However, the red destruction vanished, swallowed by the darkness.
"How could weathering be effective against that which has met demise?" Shinomiya Miyako mocked.
"S-Sorry... Mononobe."
Leaving these words, Iris was sucked into the descending darkness.
"Kyah!?"
"Mm!?"

Helpless, Tia and Ren disappeared into the torrent of darkness. Firill called out to the enemy who had taken her precious companions.
"Miyako!!"
However, her voice too was swallowed by the darkness. The deck of the *Naglfar* was smeared with a vast swathe of pure black.
Although faint blue lights flashed in the darkness, they were gradually weakening.
"Weak lights—All you can do is illuminate yourself. Sorry, Firill... You are my dear friend, but Mitsuki is my number one."
Shinomiya Miyako spoke to the sea of end matter.
At the same time, she already knew there would be no reply—

Chapter 3 – Heavy Tremors Nova

Part 1

I got a bad feeling.
It felt like there was something, that the situation had become one that was impossible to recover from—I felt such vague uneasiness.
「Don't resist if possible. Because it's too late even if you fight back at this point.」
The words that Shinomiya Miyako's fake said incited a bad imagination in my mind.
—Did we get caught in a trap? Or else did something happen to Lisa's group……and everyone else…….
I couldn't simply discard her words as mere bluff.
Shinomiya showed herself in front of us. That meant, it was a proof that something was moving following her expectation.
And then there was one more factor that bewildered me.
The expression of Shinomiya who was glaring at me—was filled with fierce anger and deep sorrow. That expression looked very human.
It was to a degree that I couldn't believe at all that she was actually a false image created by End Matter(Remnant of Demise).
「Guh……」
I fell on my knee from the invisible weight weighing on my whole body while glaring at Shinomiya.
The location was near the center of the ruins that caved in round shape.
A rainbow colored circle was floating above Shinomiya's head. The unseen power was putting pressure on the bodies of Ariella and me. She told us to not resist, but we couldn't even move in the first place.
「The terminal is breaking! Do something quickly!」
Atla was clamoring in my chest pocket, but there was nothing I could do right now.
「Are you……the real—Shinomiya?」
I questioned Shinomiya while on my knee.
Because the emotion that was conveyed from her expression, her gaze was very close to being genuine.
「Real? There is no way that's the case. I'm someone who has died a long time ago. No matter how similar I am, I'm just a fake. Firill understand such thing properly you know?」
However she denied my words with a mocking smile. In addition her words included a name that I couldn't ignore.

「Firill……? Don’t tell me, you met with Firill?」
Firill should be on standby outside the mist, so where in the world could she──.
「Yes, I have met her just now. I met Firill and──the girls in Brunhilde class who wasn’t there yet when I was still alive.」
The faces of Iris, Tia, Ren, and the others crossed my mind. A chill ran on my back.
What she said that it was too late even if we fought back now, they rang out loudly in my chest.
「You……what did you do to everyone──」
I put strength into my legs and forcefully raised my body. I threw my question at Shinomiya Miyako with a slanted posture.
Thump, thump I could hear the pounding of my own heart. My forehead felt strangely hot. Had I gotten used to the pressure? It felt like my body had gotten slightly lighter.
However beside me Ariell was still lying face down and couldn’t move from there.
Shinomiya smiled thinly seeing us like that.
「The holders of Neun’s authority outside has been absorbed by End Matter. Yes──everyone, is already inside here.」
She turned her gaze to her pitch black naginata. She then changed it into a sphere. And then she urged me to look into the mass of darkness.
「There are faint lights blinking in there right? I think they will vanish soon after this, but they are still inside here.」
Certainly there were many small blue lights blinking inside the darkness. Those were the light of──Neun’s authority. Then, everyone had really been──.
The inside of my head turned pure white. Scorching hot anger flowed into my blank mind.
My forehead felt hot, painful.
It wasn’t just my heart, something else that was different──my instinct was screaming at me to defeat the enemy before my eyes. The heat and intense pain were telling me, that the power to do that was right here.
──Forehead. The power that was dwelling in there, the authority was awakening when faced with its original enemy.
「AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH──!」
I roared and kicked on the ground. I bared my fang toward the enemy, Shinomiya Miyako who imprisoned everyone in the darkness.
The pressure that stole my body’s freedom vanished like it had never existed.
The arm I stretched out was enveloped in white light. My field of vision was also awfully bright. But I set aside my doubts for later.
I formed a steel short sword using Dark Matter(Superior Element) while running, and aimed at Shinomiya’s vital spot with its blade.
「So it become like this just as I thought──」

However Shinomiya had jumped back a step earlier as though she had anticipated my action.
「──!」
I judged that my slash wouldn't hit with this distance and threw the short sword toward her heart.
However a rainbow circle was deployed to get in its way. The short sword was flattened midair into a lump of steel that fell toward the ground.
「So close. Even though I was only planning to check the situation, I almost got killed just now. Just as I thought, it looks like my affinity with you is bad. It was "Anti Gravity(Repulsion of All Creation)" that destroyed Heavy Tremors Nova──as the possessor of that authority, you are without a doubt my natural enemy.」
Even though she was saying that, Shinomiya still smiled confidently and returned the darkness back into the shape of naginata again.
Hearing that I too understood what was going on with my body. And also the true identity of the power Shinomiya used──.
──The authority that I succeeded from Leviathan, "Anti Gravity" was residing in the forehead.
Each of the authorities was sleeping somewhere in the body. Perhaps it was thanks to Neun's special quality, the dragonification our body was being controlled. Because of that unless we consciously liberated the power, we couldn't draw out the original strength of the authority.
Ether Wind(Spirit Materialization Particle) was located in the heart, Catastrophe(End Time) was located in the right eye, and Antimatter was in the left eye. Thinking back, Leviathan had a giant horn on its forehead. It must be its core for using its authority.
And then my instinct as Counter Dragon that possessed Anti Gravity was telling me.
「"Heavy Tremors" Nova……so that's your true identity.」
I was focusing on the enemy before my eyes as one of the "real dragon". But as expected there was still question remaining. Why she was taking the form of Shinomiya Miyako……and why was she acting so similarly to human like this. I didn't understand.
「Yep, that understanding isn't wrong. My power to control gravity is erased by your anti gravity force field. But at the same time I'm the avatar of End Matter. It's another matter if it's Mitsuki, but I don't intend to lose again you guys who are unable to use Neun's authority skillfully.」
Shinomiya smiled fearlessly. Then she vigilantly looked around.
When I looked at my side, Ariella was also getting on her feet. It seemed the pressure that was pushing us down was vanishing.
「M-Mononobe-kun……that's a flashy horn you have there……but well, it's really cool.」
Ariella stood side by side with me and smiled wryly.
……Horn?

I got a bad premonition and tried to touch my forehead. There my fingertip touched a hard and big protruding object.
Furthermore it seemed to be shining for some reason. My field of vision had been strangely bright since some time ago, and it seemed to be the fault of this horn.
This must be the result of the dragonification as the successor of Leviathan.
I felt a great sense of discomfort, but looking at the past examples from Iris and others, my forehead should return back to normal soon.
「──Don't mind it for now. First we're going to defeat her and save everyone.」
「Yep. I have made my resolve, so I'm fine.」
I created a short sword from Dark Matter once more. Ariella also created two thin knives and took a stance with both of them in her hands.
「Long range attack will be repelled, but Shinomiya Miyako's power can be neutralized if I get near. In addition the opponent is humanoid. If we close the distance and stab her vital spot, we can destroy her together with the End Matter using the power of Code Lost(Scrapped Authority).」
I was Shinomiya Miyako's natural enemy in double meaning. We had a chance to win even if we couldn't use Neun's authority well.
I intentionally held back from saying "kill". I also stopped asking myself if perhaps she was the real Shinomiya Miyako.
Hesitation would dull my blade. In order to protect Ariella, in order to save everyone, I had to kill her no matter what.
「──Scary eyes. Let me just say this first, you won't be able to save Mitsuki even if you defeat me. I'm the only one who can save Mitsuki. Be aware that what you are doing is going to remove that possibility.」
Shinomiya Miyako was using her words to hold us back, perhaps she was trying to agitate us. Something like the enemy's words could just be ignored. I understood that, but this was the only time where I couldn't just pretend to not hear those words.
「You talk like……you are trying to save Mitsuki huh.」
I said with a frown.
「Because that's exactly what I'm doing. I just want to save Mitsuki. If it's necessary to achieve that, then I don't really mind even if I get killed. But right now is no good. After all there is only one way remaining to save Mitsuki.」
「……One?」
When I asked her back, Shinomiya Miyako's face twisted cynically.
「Everything is your fault. In order to protect you……in order to not look at the completely changed you, Mitsuki is trying to sacrifice herself. Because that's the most convenient way for Mitsuki, she won't listen to any other suggestion.」
「So that's why you come to kill me huh……」
Shinomiya Miyako sighed seeing me muttering that.

「Wrong. Mitsuki won't be able to live on if you die won't she? You don't even understand something like that?」
Her voice had anger and irritation mixed in it. It made me even more unable to understand her objective.
「Then, what are you──」
「You see, I want to accomplish the duty of the thing born from the End Matter. I noticed that doing that will also save Mitsuki.」
Shinomiya Miyako replied with an insinuating tone and observed my reaction. I felt something was out of place because there wasn't any sign at all that she was going to attack, but I opened my mouth anyway because this was a chance to obtain information.
「Duty?」
「Yes──the objective of End Matter is simply to "live". For that it will absorb all the people who are living right now, every energy there is, and all possibility in order for it to obtain a new life. But it also doesn't want to die again, so it chose the toughest existence──true dragons like Bahamut as candidates to be its vessel. I too only obtained this temporary life as a part of that "framework".」
She smiled wryly there and continued speaking with a voice that contained irony.
「But──of course we are just candidates, so at the end there will be only one remaining. We won't be able to obtain true life unless we kill each other and survive till the end.」
Ariella frowned hearing those words and muttered.
「That's like a kodoku. But Bahamut and Nyarlathotep looked like they were fighting together though……」
「That was because they were facing their respective natural enemy. In fact, Ragnarok seriously came to kill me. Well, it seemed Mitsuki thought that it was her who was targeted though.」
Shinomiya Miyako smiled wryly while looking around at the collapsed cityscape. Most likely this city condition was the result of the battle between Shinomiya Miyako and Ragnarok.
「In short, the duty you are saying here is──becoming the last one standing and obtaining life huh. But, how will that save Mitsuki?」
I couldn't understand that part and asked it.
「If I survive to the end, the whole End Matter will be reborn with me as the core. In other words I'll be able to create the ideal environment for myself. In a manner of speaking, I'll become the god of the new world and can create the world as I please.」
「……In exchange of the sacrifice of the current world, right?」
I asked with a low voice. But Shinomiya Miyako only nodded without any hesitation.
「Yep, that's what will happen. But that's their just deserts right? A world that manipulated Mitsuki with authority and instinct──and cornered her to a

dead end without any escape in the end, a world like that can just perish. I'll destroy it and remake it into a world that grant Mitsuki's wish.」
「Remake? You really speak like a god. But even supposing that you really can do something like that──do you think that Mitsuki will be able to accept that kind of fake world?」
I questioned her pointedly. However she didn't lose her composure.
「It won't be a fake world. After you and Firill and the others are melted into the darkness, I'll specially reconstruct you all. But I'll fiddle a little with your inside at that time though.」
Shinomiya Miyako pointed at my head with a mad glint lit up in her eyes.
「Mitsuki's Onii-san──you are also suffering right? You are scared that your feeling that is thinking of Mitsuki as the most important might have gone already aren't you? But don't worry. I'll make it so that you can only love Mitsuki. Don't worry about the other girls. I'll properly present them with a life where they can be happy even without you.」
I noticed how beside me Ariella's face stiffened.
I must be making the same expression like her. What Shinomiya Miyako said was just that repulsive and awful.
「──Something like that is even worse, far worse than a fake.」
I lowered my stance and gathered strength in my foot that was at the front.
I couldn't bear to listen to her words anymore. Ariella also erased her expression and gazed at the prey silently.
Certainly I felt confusion and worry about my own feeling.
But I didn't want other to toy with my feeling for Iris and others inside my chest──and with the heart of those girls. I absolutely couldn't forgive something like that.
Shinomiya Miyako seemed to sense the change in our atmosphere. She raised her naginata shaped End Matter and smiled.
「That might be. But, I'll still do it.」
「……Mitsuki should be sealing the majority of End Matter inside her own body. Can you become the god of the new world with the situation like that?」
I exchanged gaze with Ariella beside me and questioned Shinomiya Miyako.
It was also a sign to Ariella that we were doing this. Perhaps because there was a connection between us as the same kind, Ariella nodded at me without any hesitation.
「I'm planning to have Mitsuki transfer her End Matter to me. In the first place it's already an outrageous idea trying to seal all that in just one person, so the chance of Mitsuki failing to keep sealing it is high. That's why I intend to persuade her before that, with you as my hostage that is.」
「Hostage──?」
I decided to commence our attack after her next reply and asked her that.
「I'll take you into the End Matter and melt you completely. If you become unable to maintain your sense of self, then even Neun's authority won't be

able to illuminate you. I'll be the only one who can reconstruct you. If Mitsuki learn that, she will surely listen to me.」
「Tsu──!」
I kicked on the ground at that instant.
It sounded like Shinomiya Miyako knew about Neun's authority even better tha me, but it didn't matter anymore. This girl was someone that had to be defeated immediately, both for my sake and Mitsuki's sake too.
Ariella also leaped forward at the same time with knives in both hands.
The rainbow circle appeared to get in our way, but it was erased simply from me swinging my arm that was enveloped in white light. My forehead felt hot once more. Most likely the horn there was shining brightly.
Shinomiya Miyako leaped backward, but her timing was slightly slow. I could reach her right now──.
But, I suddenly realized. Shinomiya Miyako wasn't looking at me. Her gaze was slightly out of line, staring at behind me──she smiled.
「Thank you for going along with my talk forever. Thanks to that it looks like it finally come out.」
Shinomiya Miyako's delighted voice reached my ears. At the same time an explosive sound thundered from behind.
「Wha──」
I staggered from the shockwave that hit my back. I stopped my legs and looked back. My distance with Shinomiya Miyako was widened during that time, but I couldn't possibly ignore just what was going on behind me.
We turned our gaze toward a point that was almost at the center of the depression. The rubbles that were piled up there got blown away and a large hole was opened.
And then something with the shape of human, with a height that reached three meter appeared from that hole.
I didn't describe it as human wasn't only because of its inhuman physique, but because it also had four arms and red third eye on its forehead. It was wearing an ancient looking armor all over its body and multiple weapons like sword and spear on its back.
「A humanoid……astral life form?」
Ariella murmured with a hoarse voice. Shinomiya Miyako told us the answer.
「Yes──a divine spirit that possess outstanding power even within Ragnarok. It targeted me, but I had no way to deal with it decisively, so I sank it until the bottom of the earth with gravity. But, if it's you two than you can defeat it right?」
Shinomiya Miyako smiled provocatively. She then floated lightly to the air.
「Don't tell me, you are planning to make us deal with that──」
I noticed her intend of prolonging the conversation with us, but I couldn't chase after her. The four armed divine spirit took the weapons on its back and unleashed a murderous intent toward us.

We were forced to raise our guard against the divine spirit. Shinomiya Miyako replied to us then.
「It's taking initiative to fight on its own, so I think that thing isn't the core but—if a high ranked divine spirit is destroyed, then Ragnarok should become unstable. If that happen then perhaps it will be possible to scatter the mist with brute force. Ragnarok is an opponent that has to be defeated in order for me to become god. That's why work hard for Mitsuki and my sake—Onii-san.」
「Kuh……where are you going!?」
I yelled at her receding figure.
「It's fine, I won't do something like running away. Just like I said before, you are a hostage for persuading Mitsuki. I'll come back again after you defeat that divine spirit. During that time……I''ll take care of Liza and others first.」
Shinomiya Miyako flew away after leaving those words behind. I looked up at the sky where a faint trail of rainbow image remained before turning my gaze toward the raging divine spirit.
「Mononobe-kun, let's defeat this guy quickly and chase her! Liza and Kili are in danger.」
Ariella threw away the metal knives in her hands and changed the shape of Ether Wind into knives before retaking her stance.
Normal physical weapon didn't have any effect against astral life form. I also discarded my short sword and gathered golden particles on my right hand and created the shape of gun.
「Yeah. We'll finish it off quick.」
No matter how powerful of an existence it was, the opponent was an astral life form. Furthermore it had humanoid shape. Ariella and me who possessed Ether Wind and Code Lost should be able to do this—.
However it was the divine spirit who took the initiative from us.
UOOOOOOO—!
The divine spirit roared a war cry and brandished its spear at the same time. Then red spark surged from its tip and it mowed to all directions.
「Guh……」
The red lightning hit my arm that I used to guard. Pain and numbness spread in it.
The damage was light. However—.
「Ether Wind can't neutralize it, that means it's not just a normal lightning attack. Don't tell me it's a godly power or……some kind of psychic phenomenon?」
I was bewildered, but beside me Ariella shook her head.
「No—perhaps that's not it. Surely this lightning attack is also something that use Ragnarok's mist as intermediary. That's why this isn't any psychic phenomenon at all. It's not a ghost so—I'm not scared!」
Ariella muttered to persuade herself and charged to the middle of the raging lightning.

「There is also no effect to the terminal. That's why it's certainly not electricity. It's only something similar.」
Atla's voice came from my pocket. I listened to it while immediately following behind Ariella.
I gave up dodging the lightning and used my arm to guard while rushing forward.
The divine spirit also fired lightning from its sword. The electricity with increased density struck our body.
However the pain and numbness didn't reach an intolerable degree for us.
Most likely our spirit that was materialized by Ether Wind was tougher.
From how normal attack slipped through them, I could guess that the astral life form within Ragnarok was physically close to vapor. However our spirit that was materialized by Ether Wind changed into a solid matter that could repel physical interference. There was no doubt the difference there was the cause of Ragnarok's defeat in the past.
「Tsu──!」
I ran while firing a bullet of Ether Wind. My target was the divine spirit's forehead and heart.
However the divine spirit swung the weapons in its hands, brushing away the golden bullet.
I gulped seeing the terrific reflexes and the toughness of the weapons it had. As expected this thing was completely different from all the others astral life forms we encountered until now. Perhaps it was a divine spirit that took the form of a war god.
「──Mononobe-kun」
Ariella made eye contact with me for an instant.
Ariella was also thinking what I was thinking. We could communicate with each other with just a glance because I was sure of that. There wasn't even any need to rely on our connection as the same kind for that.
She jumped to the right while I changed direction to the left at the same time. We sandwiched the divine spirit from left and right.
The reason Ariella who was running ahead took the right side was obvious.
The divine spirit had four arms, but for some reason one of its left arms had been severed at the wrist.
Therefore Ariella would first attract its attention by attacking from the right, then I'd finish it off from the left. That was the strategy.
「Yaah!!」
Ariella intentionally yelled loudly to stand out and swung a golden knife at the divine spirit. The divine spirit intercepted Ariella with the sword and spear that its arms wielded.
Sound of weapons clashing reverberated. A moment later I fired my gun from the left side of the divine spirit.
However the divine spirit's sword deflected it once more. If this was a divine spirit that was born from the concept of martial art, it might be impossible to surpass it in technique.

But I didn’t lose my composure and targeted the divine spirit’s forehead with Ether Wind gun. And then I also held up my other hand and focused to it.
White light converged on my palm. I fired it together with a bullet.
Golden and white──those two lights approached the divine spirit. The divine spirit swung its sword to intercept them. However the white light that was slightly ahead burst midair.
──Anti Gravity.
The force field that interfered with space itself pushed back the divine spirit’s sword. Then the golden bullet gouged a hole into the side of its head that became undefended.
In that instant, the divine spirit’s body lost strength with a jerk. The weapons in its hands fell on the ground and dispersed. The four arms hung down limply and its figure was fading while still standing.
But, we had no time to wait until the divine spirit completely vanished to confirm its defeat.
「Ariella!」
I called out. Then Ariella who was running toward me grabbed my arm and flew to the sky.
「We did it Mononobe-kun! Let’s hurry to where Liza and Kili are!」
Ariella flew toward the direction where Shinomiya Miyako headed to.
Lisa and Kili said that they would investigate the surrounding of the caved in city, so I didn’t know where they were at right now.
「Atla, can’t you detect the signal from their personal phone?」
I called to the phone that was inside my pocket.
「That’s impossible. It’s not just at the outside, the reception signal is blocked inside the mist too.」
「Then……we can only try flying around the hole.」
I said that and looked up at Ariella. She responded with a nod and a thumb up.
「Roger. For now I’ll try making a lap around the hole.」
Like that we started to search for Lisa and Kili.
I sent a glance at the caved-in area. The divine spirit’s figure wasn’t there anymore.
「……That divine spirit, it was tougher than expected. If it had all its four arms, it might take longer to kill it.」
I looked down on the city from the sky while calming down my disordered breathing.
「Perhaps that was the wound from fighting Mitsuki’s group……ah, but they can’t use Ether Wind, so I guess they wouldn’t be able to wound it.」
Ariella also commented back while searching for Lisa and Kili.
「Certainly that’s true but──it’s also unnatural if it had been like that from the start. It’s a bit……puzzling.」
I felt uneasy because it felt like I was overlooking something important but, right now we didn’t have the time to think too deeply about that.

□Look, over there!□
Ariella pointed to the front. It was hard to see thanks to the mist, but there was a small cloud of dust there.
The battle was already starting.
I prayed that we would make it in time while staring at the approaching battlefield.
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Part 2

There was a round depression being formed there although it was in a smaller scale than the previous one.
At the center of the hole that was shaped like a mortar, there was black object that looked like coal tar—it must be the darkness of End Matter—accumulated. Shinomiya Miyako's figure could be seen on top of it.
Shinomiya Miyako was calmly standing on the darkness, but Kili and Lisa who were lying down in front of her were just about to get dragged into the End Matter. Their bodies were restrained by a black belt that stretched out from the darkness and their movement was sealed. The two's bodies were enveloped in blue light—Neun's authority, and yet the darkness wasn't erased and swallowed their body gradually.
「Liza-! Kili-!」
I raised my voice while swooping down toward their location with Ariella.
However the two of them lifted their face and yelled in panic when they heard my voice.
「Don't come over here! You'll get captured by the darkness too!」
「Yuu! You can just leave us for later, defeat her first!」
Liza warned us to not come, while Kili was directing her gaze toward Shinomiya Miyako.
「Kuh……Mononobe-kun, I'll get down at the edge of the hole first.」
Ariella hesitated in making decision and landed down at the outside of the depressed area.
Shinomiya Miyako smiled provocatively seeing that.
「Fufu, you are faster than I expected. Thanks for your hard work in exterminating the divine spirit. But—is it alright that you are only watching from there after hurriedly coming here to save them? Right now they are resisting with Neun's authority, but it's only a matter of time until they're swallowed by End Matter you know?」
Shinomiya Miyako turned her gaze at Lisa and Kili and asked us as though to test our reaction. Nearly half of their body was already swallowed by the darkness.
「Dammit—!」
「Wait, Mononobe-kun! It's dangerous to approach them! It might be a trap!」
I reflexively broke into a run, but Ariella caught my arm.
「Kuh……then, let's blow away the End Matter from here!」

I lifted up my left hand and focused to the dragon crest on the back of my hand.
Then blue light overflowed from the dragon crest and illuminated the surrounding brightly.
This was the light to erase the End Matter. The blue radiance to redraw the outline of what got melted into the darkness.
I was able to save Mitsuki with this light when she was about to get swallowed by End Matter. Even if I was in a state of unable to use the authority skillfully, the End Matter could be pressed back if I worked together with the two. That was why if I lent my power to Lisa and Kili who were resisting with Neun's authority──.
「Hey, that's too bright, can you stop it?」
However Shinomiya Miyako tilted her head with a composed expression.
The blue light slightly made the pool of darkness at the center of the hole to retreat slightly, but that was all. The black belt binding Lisa and Kili didn't slacken and dragged the two into End Matter.
「Lend me your strength too Ariella! You might be able to activate it if you focus your mind on your dragon mark!」
The enemy we should defeat was right before our eyes. I yelled that she should understand the method using the instinct of Counter Dragon.
「G-got it.」
Ariella had never used Neun's authority until now. She touched her abdomen and closed her eyes.
Her dragon mark was located there.
Blue light immediately overflowed from there. It could be seen even from over her clothes. It enveloped Ariella's body.
With this──four people's worth of light was produced. If the authority of Iris and others who were already swallowed also worked together with ours, it might be possible to blow away even this End Matter.
That was my hope, but Lisa and Kili's sinking didn't stop.
「Mononobe Yuu──you can stop already. More importantly……please listen. You might be unable to believe it but……she might be the real──」
Lisa sunk into the darkness in the middle of her talk. However what Lisa wanted to say was properly conveyed to me. Most likely Lisa also felt dubious about Shinomiya Miyako being a fake.
「Lisa-!」
I tried to illuminate Lisa's figure with the blue light, but the light couldn't reach the bottom of the endlessly deep darkness.
「You-……blow up-!!」
Kili glared at Shinomiya Miyako just before she got swallowed by the darkness. Then large explosion occurred around Shinomiya Miyako. It was an attack from Muspelheim──however when the flame blast and smoke was carried away by the wind, the figure of Shinomiya Miyako who had deployed the rainbow colored circle to all directions could be seen there.
Kili smiled bitterly seeing her unharmed figure.

「It’s vexing but……well, it’s alright──even though I can’t win, if it’s Yuu then he will manage somehow.」
Kili left those words behind and she also got swallowed into the darkness.
No matter how much light Ariella and I sent out, their figure didn’t come out to the surface.
I clenched my fist from being unable to save them. I let slip of my frustration.
「Kili……dammit-……why──」
The authority was invoked. But the End Matter was just too thick.
It was just like when getting swallowed by the darkness of unknown territory that flowed out from Bahamut’s shadow. However Mitsuki should have sealed the majority of the End Matter into herself. And yet why──.
「Your feeble light simply isn’t enough at all to illuminate my End Matter.」
Shinomiya Miyako spoke pityingly. I asked her.
「……Not enough? Why do you possess that much End Matter? Mitsuki should have sealed all the unknown territory until here into herself right?」
Shinomiya Miyako chuckled at my question.
「The third unknown territory──Mitsuki thought that she had sealed that one into herself, but I actually took in the majority of it. In other words you are facing a vast amount of End Matter that can fill a dome that reach until 300 km in diameter right now. A small light will naturally be immediately erased by such deep darkness.」
My knees almost bent when I learned the completely hopeless situation but──I braced my legs and held out.
──Not yet. Even then Mitsuki had easily sealed the End Matter for two unknown territories into herself. I could save everyone from inside the darkness if I could use Neun’s authority skillfully.
「We’re going to finish her off first, and then we will rescue everyone. Ariella, I’m counting on you for support.」
When I called out at Ariella who was standing in a daze, she returned to herself and took a stance.
「R-right──it’s still too early to give up isn’t it?」
Shinomiya Miyako raised her eyebrows in surprise seeing us taking a fighting stance.
「Hee……so you still haven’t given up hope. But, I have no time to go along with your useless effort. I have to return to Mitsuki’s side quickly so──I’ll end this quickly.」
Right after she declared that, black belt stretched out from the End Matter that pooled up at the center of the hole with a terrifying speed.
That darkness couldn’t be erased using Ariella and my blue light. We would end up like Lisa and Kili if it caught us. Then──.
「──Haah!」
I activated another authority with all my strength.
A sphere of blue light was formed in front of the hand that I lifted up.

Anti Gravity—”the power to repel all creation” that was wielded by Leviathan the “white”.
Until now I could only create it through the intermediary of Dark Matter, but the current me who had a shining horn grew on my forehead through the dragonification was able to directly form the anti-gravity substance.
A white ripple spread through the air. The approaching black belt had its direction diverted by the repulsive force. It couldn’t reach Ariella and me.
Our body became as light as feather. When I realized it, my feet had left the ground. Come to think of it, Leviathan was also floating by deploying repulsive force field.
Because the amount of Dark Matter that I could produce was small, I couldn’t fly by producing air but—right now I felt like I could fly freely.
「Mononobe-kun-! Not yet—we will still get swallowed at this rate!」
Ariella yelled while pointing at above.
The black belt that was diverted from its track was stretching greatly to wrap around the repulsive force field. It was trying to swallow us together with the force field into the darkness.
「Ariella!」
I grabbed Ariella’s arm and flew toward the black belt’s gap.
Just go in full speed—perhaps because of that single-minded focus, I moved too fast that even I myself couldn’t immediately perceive that I had moved.
When I came back to my senses, we were already outside the encirclement of the black belt.
I gulped at my speed that was almost like teleportation.
—If I had this mobility and the defense using repulsive force field……!
I brought Ariella and moved along the edge of the hole where the End Matter was pooled. The black belt rushed forward to capture us, but it was unable to keep up with our speed.
The black belt that circled around toward us also got scattered using the repulsive force field. I slipped through that gap.
「—You won’t be able to kill me just by running around you know?」
However at the center of the hole—above the spring that was filled with End Matter, Shinomiya Miyako was smiling.
She hadn’t changed her position at all until now. She must be waiting for us to step into the territory that was filled with End Matter. She was also giving off an air of using Lisa and others as bait to lure us in, so it made me hesitated to close in.
But, it was just as she said. My objective wasn’t to run around.
We had to defeat her—to kill her.
In order to save everyone who was absorbed into the darkness, in order to save Mitsuki for real.
It didn’t matter……even if she might be the real thing.
「Then—I’ll kill you.」
I focused my mind to the power to kill human that was sleeping inside me. I woke up the authority of the Counter Dragon that was called Fafnir.

All unnecessary emotions vanished and my mind single-mindedly formed a way to kill the human before me.
First I attempted the safe method. Just like when we defeated the divine spirit before this, I fired Ether Wind's bullet and Anti-Gravity matter simultaneously.
If the power of "Heavy Tremors" Nova was offset by Anti-Gravity, Ether Wind's bullet that couldn't interfere with physical matter would shot Shinomiya Miyako──that was my plan with this attack, but it didn't go as planned.
「Ouch……!?」
Shinomiya Miyako's expression stiffened when the bullet grazed her cheek and scattered her hair.
Although I was able to take away her composure, it didn't hit. The rainbow colored ring protecting her shook due to the interference of Anti-Gravity, but it didn't vanish completely. Because of that the golden bullet's trajectory was diverted.
However the current me didn't have the emotion to regret the failure. I analyzed the data of the failure to fuel the next plan.
──The cause of failure was the insufficient strength of the Anti-Gravity matter. Come to think of it Leviathan deployed Anti-Gravity field with itself as the center. If that was the proper way to use this power, then as expected me directly doing it was──.
My accelerated thought finished the consideration instantly and brought up the next killing method.
「We can only get close. We're rushing in, Ariella.」
「Right, I'm ready anytime.」
She replied without hesitation. The Code Lost that Ariella had was as thick as mine. It seemed that she had reached the same conclusion like me.
To completely neutralize the rainbow circle that seemed to be controlling gravity, I myself had to get close to Shinomiya Miyak──that was the final conclusion in my mind.
I dodged the black belt while measuring the timing.
I dropped my flying speed slightly to lure as much black belt as possible. And then Ariella and I slipped through the small opening when it tried to envelop us──and charged at Shinomiya Miyako in full speed.
「Welcome, into the end.」
Shinomiya Miyako had a thin smile on her lips while spreading open her arms to welcome us.
Then the next moment, the End Matter that filled the hole burst up to swallow us who were above it.
「No matter how much you can push back the End Matter using the repulsive force field, the moment you are enveloped, the inside will be filled with darkness. You won't be able to escape from darkness using that authority.」

Shinomiya Miyako’s pitying voice came from the other side of the End Matter.
However the corner of my lips twisted and I replied—while flying to right above.
「We could predict that there is a trap waiting. That’s why……-!」
The End Matter was trying to envelop us from below. There was a slight opening above us.
It would be too late if I only reacted after the End Matter burst up. But I already changed my flight direction the moment the darkness filling the hole rippled slightly.
I strongly held on Ariella’s hand and ascended with the repulsive force field enveloping me.
—Make it!
I flew toward the shrinking light with my fastest speed.
The darkness rushed to behind us and the scene of the surrounding that was covered by mist rushed into my sight.
「Yosh—」
We managed to slip out of the dome of darkness just an instant before it completely closed. Next I turned direction to right below.
I swooped down to above the head of Shinomiya Miyako who thought that she had us captured.
「Tsu—!?」
Naturally she immediately noticed and lifted her face.
However, she was slightly late. I already entered the range where I could neutralize her power.
Using Ether Wind’s gun—while Ariella was using a knife that she created from material conversion—we aimed at Shinomiya Miyako’s vital spots simultaneously.
It was a sure kill attack. The evil dragon(Fafnir) inside me was convinced that we could kill her.
Shinomiya Miyako moved her mouth in a daze when death was right before her eyes.
Of course I had no intention to sympathize with her no matter what she wanted to say. I had decided in my heart that she was someone who I had to kill right here.
But—the faint two sounds that flew into my hearing……were just too unexpected.
.
「—Papa?」
.
「-!?」
My finger that reflexively moved to pull the trigger stopped. Ariella also stopped her attacking hand.
And then that became a lethal mistake for us.

The stretching black belt wrapped around our limbs and sealed our movement midair. Because the repulsive force field was neutralizing the rainbow ring, I was unable to use it to block the End Matter.
Shinomiya Miyako looked at the restrained us and erased the trace of “her” that she showed in that brief moment. She smiled.
「So naive. To think that you two would be that shaken just by switching to that girl a little……hm.」
Shinomiya Miyako muttered with a voice that was mixed with pity. She raised her arm──and slowly lowered it.
Then the black belt was dragging us into the darkness of End Matter.
「Mononobe, kun──!」
Ariella’s figure vanished instantly. She wasn’t given any time to try anything.
「Kuh……Ariella……」
I resisted with the authority of Anti-Gravity, even so the black surface of End Matter was gradually approaching.
First my leg touched the darkness and sunk. I was feeling a chill that the sensation from my toes was vanishing while asking Shinomiya Miyako.
「Shinomiya, Miyako……what was that just now──what did you do to Shion-!?」
Yes, her expression and voice before this were exactly like Shion. We didn’t just imagine it because they had similar feature. At that time, we stopped attacking because we completely believed that it was Shion in front of us.
「Who knows? But, do you really don’t understand? Where did we first meet──won’t you find the answer if you recall that?」
I was questioned back instead. I was at a loss for words.
It felt like all the puzzle pieces had been gathered. Various things connected to each other inside my head. All the small doubts that had piled up until now was forming an answer──.
「In the lab of Asgard, I──saw Shinomiya Miyako’s soul. The soul that was materialized with Ether Wind……I learned what kind of face Shinomiya Miyako had for the first time there.」
I answered while enduring the pain of being restrained and the disgusting feeling of melting into darkness. Then Shinomiya Miyako tilted her head and urged me further.
「Yes. And where was my soul at that time?」
「Kraken’s corpse……no, wrong. Inside there was──Kraken Zwei──Shion……!」
My whole skin shuddered.
Before Mitsuki flew out of Marduk, she was together with Shion. And then Shion had been sleeping all the time since then. If these two things were actually related…….
「Don’t tell me, Shinomiya Miyako’s soul……had been together with Shion all that time? Or perhaps, could it be that you yourself is Shion──but, there

is no way that……right now you are clearly not Shion. Just who in the world are you!?」
I yelled while sinking into darkness. Shinomiya Miyako let out a long sigh while looking at me.
「Well──good job for learning that much. I'll specially teach you the right answer. It's just like I said at the beginning, I'm the fake of Shinomiya Miyako who was born from the End Matter. My true identity is the core of "Heavy Tremors" Nova──I took this form because it was convenient to agitate Mitsuki's heart with this.」
Shinomiya Miyako spoke triumphantly, perhaps because she was feeling composed and convinced of her victory.
「But you see, even if this body is fake──the inside is real.」
「The inside──by that you mean……the souk?」
She nodded at my question.
「Yes, something like that, what you call soul or heart. My soul you see, it had been together with Shion all that time. No……to be more accurate, perhaps I should say that it's mixed together with Shion I guess. I think the dead me wanted to have that body. But the awakened Shion had her own ego……I who was only a dreg got swallowed and vanished.」
She smiled self-depreciatingly. She placed her hand on her chest.
「But, after I became a part of Shion like that, this vessel──the body of Shinomiya Miyako appeared. When I noticed that, I wanted to save the suffering Mitsuki……and desperately reached out my hand from inside Shion's dream……when I realized it I had moved into this body. I think that perhaps Shion's heart also got dragged together with me at that time.」
「Then……Shion is really there inside you……」
As I thought, the vestige of Shion that we saw before this wasn't just my misunderstanding.
「Yep, she is here. It's just that our position has been reversed from before. With us staying inside the body of Shinomiya Miyako, it makes me the master. Shion's consciousness is starting fade inside me.」
「Kuh……are you planning to erase Shion's heart? Stop……return her to her own body right away! That girl hasn't done anything bad right?」
I finally had sunk until my neck. I desperately pleaded like that.
「That's not something that I can possibly do. My soul and Shion are connected. They can't be severed. But just now──if you were able to kill only me, then perhaps Shion's soul might be liberated from me.」
A faint sadness showed in Shinomiya Miyako's face and she shook her head.
「Shinomiya Miyako……! With this are you really──」
My mouth was swallowed into the End Matter while I was in the middle of talking. I couldn't feel my lower body at all anymore. My left hand that was stretching toward Shinomiya Miyako could still move a little but, my right arm that was submerged into the darkness was losing strength.

The darkness that was flowing in from the mouth was robbing warmth from inside my body. I even felt pain from how cold it was, but even that sensation was starting to fade immediately.
「──Of course, I'm fine with this. I have decided to save Mitsuki no matter what I have to sacrifice for that.」
Shinomiya Miyako stared down at me fixedly while answering.
However a small wry smile formed on her lips.
「Perhaps the true Shinomiya Miyako wasn't this kind of person. Even if it's for Mitsuki's sake, doing something like discarding Lisa and Firill……and Onee-chan and others might not be something that she could do. But I am……the remnant of "Miyako in the moment when she tried to protect Mitsuki with her life". Rather than a complete soul, I'm more like a fragment of a feeling. That's why I can do anything──sorry.」
Even my nose sank into the darkness and I couldn't even breathe.
Shinomiya Miyako apologized to me.
And then finally even my sight was covered in darkness. I couldn't even hear any sound now. I couldn't even feel which was up or down, left or right. I was falling in a black world.
Floating up in the darkness was faint blue light. That was the dragon crest on the back of my left hand. Neun's power that was leaking from there was still maintain the outline of "Mononobe Yuu" just barely.
But the End Matter was too vast for a small light like this to oppose.
If I believed Shinomiya Miyako's words──I would melt into the darkness soon and got reconstructed into a "Mononobe Yuu who only loved Mitsuki" in the new world that she would create. I also wouldn't be responsible anymore for Iris and others who became my mates, and they would be given a happy life for each of them.
Perhaps that was a conclusion where nobody would become unhappy. That might be the correct way of life.
However, even so──I didn't want someone else to decide what was happiness for me.
──AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-!
I yelled inside my heart. I roused up myself, to struggle desperately. I reached out to the other side of the darkness.
There was only one way to breakthrough this situation. It was by using Neun's authority skillfully.
However even now I didn't know anything──of where Neun's authority was residing, or what kind of power it was specifically.
Think, remember. What happened at that day when I obtained this power.
Of course I remembered. It was burned into my brain. I couldn't forget it even if I wanted.
The trigger was──the traffic accident where Mitsuki's parents became victim.
That day I was together with Mitsuki's family. We were going to camping place by car. But it suddenly became pitch black outside even though we

weren’t even inside a tunnel. Then the sound of brake could be heard—and when I came to myself my whole body felt painful, with the smell of blood and gasoline piercing my nose.
I couldn’t see anything. I didn’t understand what just happened. I desperately called for Mitsuki’s name. I searched for uncle and aunt.
I groped for the seat with my hand and cut my fingers from glass fragments. Even so I thought that I managed to somehow grab Mitsuki’s arm—the car creaked right after that. My senses were receding while I was waiting for the shaking to calm down, I lost sensation where Mitsuki was located even though I should be holding her arm. From my heart I wanted a light to illuminate the darkness at that time.
And then—I felt pulse in my left hand, and heat that felt like it was burning me from under the skin, and light cleaved through the darkness.
When I came back to my senses, I found Mitsuki and myself on the back seat of the totaled car—thing was still really hellish even from there, but thanks to me manifesting the power of “D”, we managed to escape from the distorted car frame.
Thinking back now, the light at that time was definitely the authority of Neun.
Then, was the authority dwelling in my left hand as I expected? My hand that touched Mitsuki inside the darkness and the dragon crest’s location were also my left hand.
—Please!
But no change occurred even after I focused my mind to my left hand. I also tried with my right hand but the result was the same.
Why? What I did inside the darkness at that time was only groping around with my hand to search for Mitsuki. Was it a mistake thinking that the authority’s location was in the hand and fingers to touch other people?
The blue light was fading even while I was confused and bewildered. The sensation in my body was vanishing.
I had no intention of giving up. However my limit and the end were steadily approaching.
—Neun’s authority existed to repel this darkness right? Then show me your true power! When are you going to activate if not now!!
I yelled inside my chest, but the power didn’t respond. Even though Neun’s instinct had hurt Mitsuki so much like that, it wouldn’t teach me anything when it really mattered. Even though the enemy who I should fight was right here, I didn’t understand at all what I should do and how to do it.
Finally all the sensation of my body except of my left hand was mostly gone. My consciousness was receding. It felt like I would even forget just what I was thinking just now.
—No, rather……who am I?
I couldn’t recall my name. I also became unable to recall how I look.
Even the determination in my chest, the fighting spirit that pushed my body were melting into the darkness and turning hazy.

Just what was I trying to do? What was I struggling for?
The darkness was pervading until the deepest part of me, taking away everything there.
First I felt a strong terror at this feeling of vanishing into nothing, but even that terror immediately vanished.
Why I must not vanish, why do I have to stay as myself—I didn't know the reason for that.
But, it felt painful for unknown reason. I wanted to quickly let go of the pain that stabbed into my chest.
However, even so the one last remaining thing—something that was like a stubbornness was refusing to yield itself to the darkness.
—No, no, no, no……don't, don't, I don't want to vanish, who the hell is going to accept such fate—something……there is something that I have to do no matter what-!!
But, resisting would just prolong the suffering.
My heart was worn down inside the darkness, my feeling was whittled down.
And then when even that last stubbornness was about to vanish……I heard a faint voice.
.
「Mononobe—」
.
—Whose voice was that? And whose name was that?
Such question floated inside my hollow heart. At the same time I recalled.
—Mononobe……Mononobe, Yuu……my name…….
When I regained the name that I almost forgot, the other memories were also resurrected one after another.
The thing that I had to do no matter what, what I had to protect, the enemy standing in my way—a lot of faces crossed my mind.
—That's right. I'm going to where Mitsuki is. I'll save everyone who was swallowed by End Matter……I'll defeat Shinomiya Miyako who is on my way……absolutely-!!
Resolve and determination lit a fire inside my chest. However that fire wasn't something that was born inside me. It came from outside—it was brought to me by the voice that called for me.
—Where did that voice come from…….
When I looked around inside the darkness for the voice's owner, I found several blue lights blinking.
They were like—stars.
They were like dazzling stars that still sent their light to the ground even when thin cloud was covering the dark sky.
Those lights, there were seven of them.
The light was pulsing with the same cycle like heartbeat. I reached out with my left hand that was lit with a light of the same color.
—Is someone, there? Are you, calling for me?

When I turned my consciousness to there, the darkness was shaken by familiar voices.
「Mononobe-kun.」
I knew. This was Firill's voice.
「Onii-chan.」
It was Ren next.
「Yuu-」
Tia was also calling me.
「──Mononobe Yuu!」
Next Lisa's voice reached my ear.
「Yuu-!」
The one who called me with a slightly angry voice was Kili.
「Mononobe-kun-!」
Ariella was also desperately calling for my name.
The sensation of my body was returning each time my name got called.
Before I realized it I became able to see my own body. Blue light enveloped my body and prevented the darkness's encroachment.
──Why so suddenly…….
.
「Mononobe」
.
The first voice reached my ear again.
I couldn't remember before this because I almost lost myself, but I knew now. Her voice, her radiant smile, they were resurrected clearly inside my mind.
That smile that was etched deeply inside my heart was something more beautiful and valuable than any gem.
I gently, muttered……her precious name.
「──Iris」
Then one of the lights that was blinking inside the darkness became bigger.
It illuminated a human silhouette to the forefront.
That was the silhouette of the girl who remained behind in Naglfar, who I heard got swallowed into Shinomiya Miyako's End Matter──Iris Freya.
「Thank goddd……Mononobe, you finally replied.」
Iris wiped her eyes with her finger and smiled in front of me.
That expression, it was even more radiant than the smiling face that I etched inside my chest.
Iris was this near to me. It made me felt really strange, and unbearably happy.
The light that I thought was in a place beyond my reach like a star in the night sky, was apparently in a distance that was within my reach.
「Have you……called for me all this time?」
「No──it wasn't just Mononobe, but everyone else too……all this time.
Because the lights were gradually growing smaller, as though they were going to vanish anytime now. But see, the light got a bit brighter, just for a

little when I called out to them. And then everyone also imitated that—we kept calling at each other while doing our best to not vanish.」
Iris answered like that and grasped my hand. The definite contact and warmth that were transmitted to me felt very reassuring.
「You were calling their name……」
Some kind of a hunch flashed in my mind from what she said.
Perhaps I was misunderstanding something about Neun's authority. What was the first thing that I did inside the darkness when I was small?
「But, as I thought Mononobe is amazing. My body returned to normal just from you calling my name.」
Iris spoke while staring at her own hands and feet.
「That's……no, I'm not the amazing one. It was because iris called out to everyone at the beginning—that light got reflected on each other, converged, and illuminated me.」
If I had to make an example, Iris was the sun and everyone else was the moon, and I was the earth that only got illuminated—I didn't do anything.
The first word, the light, it came from Iris.
—Aa, so it was like that.
It felt like I finally found the answer and touched my throat.
「What's wrong Mononobe?」
Iris asked me with a puzzled look. I replied to her with a wry smile.
「I finally understand. What kind of thing Neun's authority is—where is it residing and how to use it……everything.」
「I-is that so? Then can you save everyone else and get out from this pitch black darkness?」
Iris asked me enthusiastically. I nodded deeply.
「Yeah, that's why you help me too iris. Neun's authority—it's surely dwelling in our voice.」

I stared at her blue eyes and told her about my realization.
—Yes, the voice. The first thing that the childish me did inside the darkness was calling for Mitsuki's name. I tried to illuminate the darkness where nothing could be seen with my words. Just like what Iris did right now.
「Voice?」
「Yeah. First let's focus to our voice and call out to everyone. If my thinking is correct, Neun's authority should display an incomparable power from before.」
I urged Iris and looked around at the blue lights that were scattered in the darkness.
「—Got it. I'll try.」
Iris clenched her fists and nodded. She put her hand on her throat and took a deep breath.
「Call out after me. First is —Firill-!」
The members who remained behind in Naglfar should be absorbed first, so I started from their name.
「Firill-chan-!」
Iris also yelled after me.
Then it was as though our voice became light. Radiant flash cleaved the darkness and entered one of the blue stars.
Right after that, the blue light swelled up and traced Firill's figure.
「Wah……I'm back.」
Firill blinked in surprise. Seeing that Iris and I turned toward the blue stardust that were scattered about in the darkness of End matter and yelled as loudly as we could.
「Tia!」「Tia-chan!」
「Ren!」「Ren-chan!」
「Lisa!」「Lisa-chan!」
「Ariella!」「Ariella-chan!」
「Kili!」「Kili-chan!」
The stars changed form into our comrades one after another. We looked at each other inside the darkness.
「Yuu, Iris, thank you-!」
「I felt energetic when Onii-chan and Iris called my name……thank you.」
Tia and Ren hugged my arms with smile on their face.
「……You really saved us there. I never knew that it would be this scary to feel your existence fading like that.」
「Yep, I don't want to go through something like that ever again. Perhaps I'd give up right away if I was alone there.」
Lisa and Ariella patted down their chest with a heartfelt relief.

Amidst that, for some reason Kili was looking at me with a bit of dissatisfaction in her gaze.
「Yuu……why didn’t you call my name first?」
「Eh? No, I thought that Firill and others who got swallowed into the darkness earlier would be in more risk──」
I called Kili last also because she seemed to be the one who was the most tenacious──or perhaps the gutsiest──amidst everyone, but let’s refrain from saying that. I somehow got the feeling that Kili wouldn’t be happy even if I praised her like that.
「Hmph……well, fine then if that’s the case. And, what are we going to do now?」
Kili shrugged her shoulders reluctantly before she turned her gaze to the darkness that surrounded us from every direction. We were able to regain our form, but we still hadn’t escaped from the End Matter.
Firill who was checking her own limbs also turned her gaze toward me and asked a question.
「Mononobe-kun, I heard your conversation with Iris……is it true that Neun’s authority is residing in the voice?」
「──Yeah. I’m convinced now after trying to call out at everyone. Until now Neun’s authority has helped maintaining our body when the darkness tried to swallow us, or maintain the human form of those who almost turned into dragon──all this time it’s manifested as “light” that fixed the shape of something unstable with ambiguous form. But, human cannot produce light on their own right?」
Firill smiled wryly when I asked her that in return.
「Yes. We aren’t firefly after all.」
「Right──that was why we should thing what is the equivalent of “light” for human. I finally arrived at the answer when everyone called my name just now. What human is using to identify and define other people and object──is the words that we put into our voice.」
Lisa put her hand over her mouth and muttered after hearing my reply.
「In other words, how we called each other’s name before this helped us define each other so that we could regain our form……is that it?」
I nodded deeply at that question.
「That’s what I think. For human, words are like the light that illuminate the darkness──that’s why I’m convinced that Neun’s authority……the blue light that oppose the End Matter is residing in our voice.」
「Tia think what Yuu said is correct! The instant Yuu called Tia, Tia recalled that I’m Yuu’s bride! That voice was really like a radiant light.」
Tia agreed with me. Ren also nodded her head.
「……Me too. I have no objection with Onii-chan’s opinion.」
「I guess──I’m also in agreement. But, what are we going to do now? Can we erase this End Matter using our voice and word?」
Ariella looked around uneasily. I said this to her.

「No, most likely Neun's power isn't something to annihilate the End Matter. Surely it's just something to grant shape in the end. When I was swallowed by End Matter at my childhood──I think I defined all the darkness there as "Mitsuki" to save her. Because of that the End Matter got sealed inside Mitsuki. Most likely that's also how Mitsuki sealed the unknown territories.」
「……By that you mean, that girl defined the unknown territory's dome and the End Matter filling Bahamut's shadow as "herself"?」
Kili frowned and spoke in disbelief.
「Mitsuki-chan, she is……holding in that much End Matter inside herself?」
Iris also spoke in worry.
「I don't know whether she can completely hold them all in. I think that perhaps she is forcing herself.」
Darkness would be hemmed into narrow shadow when it was illuminated by light. However if the light was cut off even just for an instant, it would flood out everywhere. There was no doubt that Mitsuki was in such a dangerous state.
「Then, we need to hurry even more. If someone has to seal this darkness for us to escape from here, I'll take up that role.」
Lisa volunteered herself with resolve in her voice.
But I shook my head and turned my gaze above.
「No, there is no need for someone to take in this darkness. We will return this darkness to its owner──our enemy.」
「Enemy……you mean, her aren't you?」
Lisa muttered with an expression that was enduring pain. Firill also pressed her chest with a look of suffering.
「Yeah──but she is the real one while at the same time she isn't. We have to defeat her no matter what in order to save Shion too.」
「For Shion-san? Why?」
Lisa and others looked confused. I told them about her true identity and objective, and the situation that Shion was placed in right now.
Then even the hesitating Lisa and Firill nodded with determination.
「──I understand. We have to save Shion-san no matter what, and I can't allow her to decide my life as she pleases. After all I have decided to follow what my heart is telling me.」
「Me too, I'll fight. Perhaps that's……the only thing that I can do as her friend. If she is unable to stop herself, then someone has to stop her no matter what.」
Everyone else also nodded without any objection. We exchanged gazes.
And then we shared the "name" that we should say after this and then spoke at the same timing.
We put Neun's authority──the light of defining into our voice to cram the infinite darkness into a shadow with shape.
.
「──Shinomiya Miyako.」

.
The moment the darkness was given name—the darkness was cleaved apart by a blue light.
We were thrown from the pitch black space into a world with shape.
For a moment we couldn’t see anything because of how bright it was, but the texture of ground could be felt from the back of our feet.
I reflexively opened my closed eyes and saw a hazy human shadow in front of us.
My eyes were gaining clarity after blinking several times. The figure of the black haired girl who was looking this way—Shinomiya Miyako was coming into view.
「All of you……how did —」
Shinomiya Miyako looked around with a shocked expression.
I also looked at my left and right. The figures of my comrades were there.
Iris, Tia, Lisa, Firill, Ariella, Ren, Kili—everyone had gone out from the darkness of End Matter safely.
「……What happened? I had been in a state where it was impossible to observe anything all this time……」
The bewildered voice of Atla came from my pocket.
It seemed that she couldn’t obtain information from outside while she was inside the End Matter. However the explanation should be put off for later.
Because in front of us was the enemy that we should defeat.
It seemed that Shinomiya Miyako had moved while we were captured inside the darkness. The ground wasn’t depressed here. Round buildings that still retained their shape were lined up at the sides of the road.
「Shinomiya Miyako, we came to stop you. I—we will be the one to save Mitsuki.」
I met Shinomiya Miyako’s eyes and sharply told her.
「Aa……so that’s how. All of you has also become able to use Neun’s authority well.」
Confusion vanished from Shinomiya Miyako’s expression. She smiled wryly and looked down at her own hands.
「……I can’t bring out the End Matter outside anymore. So you pushed in all that darkness into me—but, it’s still too early to believe that you have won. Even if you now can perfectly control your authority, you will only arrive at the same fate like Apocalypse in the end.」
「Apocalypse? Why are you mentioning the name of the seventh calamity now?」
The seventh dragon—”Disasterification” Apocalypse. I turned a questioning gaze at Shinomiya Miyako who mentioned that name.
「Eh……aa, I see. All of you—are using that light without even understanding that. Then, perhaps even I still have a chance to win. If there is a light that cannot be melted even by that darkness……that’s surely must be the “light source”—」

Shinomiya Miyako muttered that. Then a rainbow colored ring floated above her head.
It seemed that she had resolved herself to fight us as the “Heavy Tremors” Nova. I was bothered about the matter of Apocalypse, but it seemed she had no intention to explain any further than that.
Then the only thing left to do was to fight.
The horn on my forehead had vanished without me realizing it. Most likely my dragonified body was returned to normal when we illuminated each other with Neun’s authority.
However, when I focused my mind, a throbbing heat was born inside my forehead.
—It’s fine. I also hadn’t forgotten the way to use Anti-Gravity.
I tried to draw out the original power of the authority like before but—I felt a slight tremor at that time.
「What—?」
I felt a vague apprehension and raised my guard toward the surrounding. Shinomiya Miyako also gasped and looked around.
GOUUUUUUUUU———.....
A low sound that sounded like a tremor reached my ear. It wasn’t just the ground, even the air was shaking.
The mist that was drifting in the area was thinning down and then thickening again. Such thing kept repeating before a wind that suddenly started to blow cleared the mist away.
The wind whirled at far away like a tornado. It blew up the building rubbles to the sky.
「Ragnarok is getting this unstable—don’t tell me……has Mitsuki found the core—!」
Shinomiya Miyako whispered without hiding her bewilderment. She turned her back toward us and floated up to the sky.
「—Where are you going!?」
When I raised my voice, she turned back this way just for a moment and spoke in irritation.
「Both you and me don’t make it in time. Regardless of how things goes, Mitsuki is already—」
Shinomiya Miyako bit her lips and then flew away immediately.
「I don’t really understand the situation, but it seems that it will be better to chase after her.」
Lisa urged us to move. Iris spoke uneasily.
「Did something happen to Mitsuki-chan? Then, we have to hurry!」
「—Yeah, let’s go before we lose sight of her.」
I nodded deeply and used the authority of Anti-Gravity to float in the air. Everyone also formed their fictitious armament and followed after me. Iris who couldn’t fly was carried by Lisa.
「Both you and me don’t make it in time.」

The words that Shinomiya Miyako left behind were stuck into my ears and wouldn’t go away.
I flew with everyone toward the sky of raging mist while harboring extremely unpleasant premonition in my chest.

Chapter 4 – Stardust of Blue Light

Part 1

While Mononobe Yuu and others were imprisoned in End matter, Mononobe Mitsuki was also facing a great danger.
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At the end of the ruins of the ancient civilization(Atlantis)—there gigantic cone shaped towers were arrayed. They really stood out among the other buildings.
The surrounding of the towers was left as open space. The wall of white mist was blocking the way at the other side.
「Tsu……haah……haah……guh……」
I—Mononobe Mitsuki stood up while breathing hard and enduring the pain in my body.
The wall of mist that was rising high at the other side of the towers……the last unknown territory was ahead of there. That was what I sensed from the sense of the End Matter pulling at each other.
However before that……there was an enemy getting in my way in front of the arrayed towers.
When I approached the cone shaped towers, “that” appeared from inside the mist. I noticed in that instant. This place was most likely a temple, a sacred place worshipping “that”.
I felt with my skin the hostility and fury that were directed toward me. I also realized that this was a place where it was forbidden to enter.
However I had to cross this area in order to arrive at the unknown territory at the other side of the mist.
That was why I fought “that”. I fought against the greatest and strongest divine spirit among all the astral life forms that I had seen until now—.
「Brionac(Divine Bow of Five Flashes)……」
My fictitious armament had vanished because I lost consciousness just for a moment. I reconstructed it and gazed at the enemy getting in my way.
To describe it succinctly, “that” was a giant god.
Its height was more than ten meters. Its whole body was covered with sublime armor. Because it was wearing a full-face helmet, I couldn’t see its face. No, looking at the light that was leaking out from the helmet’s slight opening, perhaps it didn’t have anything inside while the armor itself was its real body.

It didn’t have multiple arms like the divine spirit that I fought before. It only had a single large spear in its hands. However I had learned with my own body of how destructive the shining giant spear’s tip was.
When I looked behind me, the sight of the ancient civilization’s townscape that was gouged in a single line entered my sight. Anyone would shudder if they learned that such thing was done by a single thrust of the divine spirit’s spear.
—My tiny body would vanish without a trace if that hit me directly.
I ended up like this just from getting bathed in the attack’s after-effect. I was blown together with my wind barrier until I crashed on a building’s wall before falling to the ground.
My body staggered from the impact that I couldn’t fully neutralize. An urge to vomit rose from inside.
And then the giant god in my way moved to point the tip of its spear once more toward the intruder while still not leaving from the sacred ground.
I laughed while watching such despairing sight.
「Aa……I’m really glad.」
What came out from my mouth was words of relief. I was thankful to this “fortune” from the bottom of my heart.
I was glad the last thing that stood on my way was this astral life form. If it was a swarm of giant beast or wyvern like what I saw in the beginning, there would be nothing that I could do.
Of course, I knew that the giant god standing before me was an astral life form with strength that was in a different dimension compared to the others of its kinds. But, even so—I had a chance to win if this was my opponent.
「It really helps……that the last enemy has human shape.」
I generated air from my fictitious armament to envelop myself with wind and flew to the air.
Right after that, the spot where I was standing until just now was pierced by a radiant light.
Considering the long arm of the giant god and the spear’s reach, that spot should be outside of its range. However the light that was fired from the tip of the spear traveled until the horizon that was covered by mist. Everything on its way was blown away without a trace.
「Kuh……she is like Lisa-san.」
I smiled wryly while being blown roughly at the air by the shockwave—then I readied my bow.
「The second arrow, Night Blaze(Shining Light That Scorch the Sky)-!!」
An arrow of red heat ray tore through the misty world and hit the right shoulder of the giant god.
A huge explosion blew up and the giant god’s body was slightly shaking.
—The attack didn’t slip through!
As I thought it was possible. I was convinced.
I noticed this phenomenon when fighting the four armed divine spirit together with Miyako-san. The attack that I aimed toward the ground to

create a smoke screen hit the divine spirit by chance and blew off one of its hands.
Even though my attack couldn’t hit astral life form that had animal form, it hit the humanoid divine spirit—the reason that I could think up to explain why was the existence of Code Lost.
Code Lost interfered with the cause and effect itself to take away human’s life.
In the extreme case, it could even decide a human’s death just by imagining it. But of course I had no such power.
Because the Code Lost that was transferred to me was only a little.
However even with that, I had the authority for killing human.
If the complete Code Lost was something that could decide a human’s death with 100% certainty, the authority that I used could only kill other person with only several percent chance even if I focused to it……no, perhaps it was even less than one percent.
But, it wasn’t zero. As long as it wasn’t zero—something with human shape would become an existence that I could kill.
In other words, the phenomenon that was occurring in front of me was something like that.
It didn’t matter that it was an astral life form, or that it was a very powerful divine spirit, as long as it had human form, the chance of me being able to kill it would be created. Even if it was just an extremely small chance—.
「The Third Arrow—Luna Eater(The Moon Piercing Empty Sky)!」
I attacked the giant god that was getting unbalanced.
The grey arrow that was tinged with phosphorescence changed a part of its chest protector into dust. With a chink getting opened in its armor, red light blew out from inside like blood.
That light gouged the surrounding area like buckshot. I desperately weaved through the red rain.
My attack just now was an attack that assaulted the target it hit with chained disintegration, but the effect was limited. Although my attack could hit now due to the influence of Code Lost, it seemed that it couldn’t help me to easily deal a lethal damage.
However, if that was the case then I only needed to continue attacking until it died.
The giant god rallied itself and swung its spear horizontally.
It was a slash of light that was launched toward me. I instantly accelerated to maximum speed and dodged it in a hair’s breadth, but a part of the air enveloping me was blown away and I lost my balance.
The giant god vertically swung down its spear while I was in such state.
I couldn’t dodge in time anymore. Then I should intercept—I fired an arrow of Dark Matter toward the slash of light flying at me.
「Fourth Arrow-……White Out(Freezing Sun)!!」

The arrow of extremely low temperature material that instantly robbed away the heat at the surrounding snatched the energy of the slash of light, creating a thick ice wall in front of me.
The slash's destructive power decreased. Although it still broke the ice, it perspired before reaching me.
—I wouldn't lose. I'd definitely reach it. I would, protect Nii-san.
In the end, someone had to be sacrificed in order to destroy the End Matter. I understood after I became able to use Neun's authority skillfully. The "light of defining" that was residing inside words couldn't suppress the End Matter that was spreading endlessly.
There was only one way to destroy it. Cramming it into a human vessel and then "killing" it together with the power of Code Lost that controlled cause and effect.
End Matter was a lump of thing that refused "to completely vanish". It simply struggled in an unsightly way just to live. Even now it was screaming from the bottom of the shadow inside me. It was moaning I don't want to die, I want to live longer.
By taking in the unknown territories, the thickness of End Matter inside me was increasing. A normal human would lose their life instantly and became a part of the darkness if they tried the same thing.
That was why, right now only those with Neun's authority was able to seal a great amount of End Matter inside their body. No, it was unknown if it was possible for one person to hold all of them even if they had the authority.
She—the fake Shinomiya Miyako had repeatedly pleaded at me to hand her the End Matter. She even said that it was fine even if she died in my place.
That was without a doubt sweet words to lead me astray. But even if she was actually the real Miyako, even if her words were the truth, I couldn't possibly agree to her proposal.
If she obtained the whole End Matter, she would completely become the ninth dragon. There was no guarantee that she would be able to maintain her current personality, and she might even lose her human form. If that happened than the method to destroy End Matter would be lost and all living creatures would die.
—That was why, I……!
I weaved through the fierce attacks of the giant god while continuing to fire my arrows.
No matter how many times I was blown away, no matter how many times I crashed on the ground, I immediately stood up and raised my bow.
If someone had to drag the End Matter into hell together with them, I'd be the one to do it. I wouldn't hand over this role to anybody else.
I didn't think of it as pulling out the short straw. I myself was the one wishing to use up my life here.
After all, the future from here on—would become something that only brought me suffering.

Surely even the pain that my body was feeling right now wouldn’t even compare to that.
If the ninth calamity was destroyed, Nii-san would lose his instinct as Neun. However even then Nii-san would definitely keep paying attention and treating me kindly. He would still treasure me. But that was exactly why, he might be treating me in reservation and became unable to express his true feeling.
I didn’t want that. I didn’t want to get in the way of Nii-san’s happiness. I wanted Nii-san to be happier than anybody else in the world.
—If it was for that, then it didn’t matter what I had to do……-!
A flash ran through right beside me. I crashed violently on a tower due to the shockwave.
I absorbed the majority of the impact with the wind enveloping me, but my breathing got caught in my throat—I chocked and coughed out saliva that was mixed with blood.
But the giant god was also covered in wound already. The armor covering its whole body was broken here and there. Radiant light was leaking from there.
Zuuuunn—…….
The giant god finally fell on its knee. Seeing that, I kicked on the wall of the tower and closed the distance with my greatest acceleration.
I aimed at the giant god’s head from close range and nocked an arrow of Dark Matter.
—This is the end……!
「Final arrow—Last Quark(The Star Falling to the Sky)!!」
The black arrow I fired was sucked into the giant god’s head—and let out a radiant explosion.
Streaks of light burst out from the giant god.
My eyes were blinded by that light. The explosion’s shockwave blew me away.
The sky was dyed pure white. I caught a glimpse of the giant god’s figure turning into red particles and vanished amidst that.
.
I opened my eyes when I felt the rumbling of the shaking ground and air.
It seemed that I fainted for a brief moment.
When I lifted up my face from the rough road surface, I saw the mist whirling here and there. The rubbles of the buildings that were destroyed from the battle flew to the sky. The towering wall of mist at the other side of the holy ground was also starting to thin down.
From the gap of the mist, I could see the darkness of End Matter. I saw the dome of unknown territory that was my destination and got on feet unsteadily.
I didn’t really understand what happened. However, there was no doubt that there was nothing standing on my way now.
「Tsu……just……a bit more……」

My consciousness was hazy. I also couldn’t create my fictitious armament.
I mustered my remaining strength and approached the unknown territory step by step.
—I wonder who would take up the student council president’s duty if I die…….
Such thinking crossed my mind when the end was approaching in front of me.
—Soon it will be time to plan for the Christmas event after all……my successor will have it hard. The vice president can take up my place but……
I won’t have any worry at all if I can ask Lisa-san to nominate herself…….
Thinking again, there were unexpectedly a lot of things that were left undone.
—Nii-san’s birthday is also close……I wanted to properly celebrate it. I had been experimenting in making cake when I had time but……in the end it was a pointless effort.
For some reason, my cheek felt hot. My sight was blurry.
But, there was no way I was crying. There was nothing to feel sad about.
Because I was going to make my wish came true now—.
The unknown territory was already really close in front of me.
My hand would reach if I took just several more steps. I swallowed my saliva to moisten my dry throat.
Now, let’s give a shape to this darkness.
I stared at the pitch black darkness that didn’t allow even a shred of light to pass and inhaled—I put Neun’s light into my words.
「You are me, I am you……your name is Mononobe Mitsuki.」
I announced that and stretched out my hand. I softly touched the darkness with my fingertip that was overflowing with blue light.
「That’s why—become one with me and let’s die together.」
The next moment, my sight and consciousness was filled with nothing but blackness.
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Part 2

Atlantis civilization’s townscape that was covered by mist was in the verge of collapsing.
Tornados was arising everywhere. Holes opened in the mist wall and I could see sea water flooding in.
The black down of unknown territory that couldn’t be seen until now due to the mist covering it could be seen right now from between the gap of the whirling mist. The many figures of astral life forms that were flying in the sky before this couldn’t be seen anywhere.
Shinomiya Miyako was flying in front of us. It seemed her destination was the unknown territory.
I who was flying using Anti-Gravity checked that everyone was following me before looking down at the ruins of Atlantis.
This area still wasn’t filled by flooding, but sea water was pouring in from everywhere, so this place would sink at the bottom of the sea sooner or later.
I felt a discomfort on my forehead and scratched there with my finger. I was using Anti-Gravity, but the horn still hadn’t grown there for now. However if I fought seriously against Shinomiya Miyako, my body would be dragonified once more and the shining white horn should grow from my forehead.
「—Yuu」
My name was called and I looked at the right. There Tia was staring at me with a serious expression.
「What’s wrong?」
「This is……Ragnarok isn’t simply getting unstable. It’s breaking and vanishing. I’m just guessing but……the core might have been destroyed.」
Tia was pointing at the crumbling world of mist. She was speaking with an uneasy tone.
「Shinomiya Miyako also whispered something like that before this……if that’s the case, was it Mitsuki who did it?」
「That might be the case. But, Mitsuki should be able to use Ether Wind, and yet……」
Tia nodded even while looking puzzled.
「We can just ascertain with our own eyes about the things that we don’t understand. Surely Mitsuki is at where Shinomiya Miyako is heading to.」
「—Yep, it’s just like Yuu said. Let’s go quickly to Mitsuki’s side!」
We nodded at each other and raised our speed as fast as possible.

The bad premonition kept growing bigger inside my chest, but right now I should focus on chasing after Shinomiya Miyako.
And then the black dome of unknown territory had approached right in front of us in the blink of eye.
「Ah……I can't see her anymore!」
Iris raised her voice there.
Shinomiya Miyako suddenly lowered her altitude, because of that her figure was completely hidden behind the cover of building.
「We're going down too!」
We hurriedly went to the point where Shinomiya Miyako vanished, but we immediately found her without even needing to search for her.
She was right at the edge of the unknown territory, where some cone shaped towers were lined up. The surrounding there was formed of empty space with good visibility.
Shinomiya Miyako was standing at the other side of a tower—beside the black dome that was towering high. She was staring fixedly at the unknown territory. We landed behind her but, she didn't react at all.
「Miyako-san—we caught up with you!」
However when Lisa called at her, she slowly turned her face toward us. We held our breath seeing her expression.
「Miyako……are you crying?」
Firill hesitantly asked. Seeing a drop of tear falling from Shinomiya Miyako's eyes—
「Eh? Aa……yeah, it's frustrating……you know. Because just as I thought…… I don't make it in time.」
Shinomiya Miyako wiped her tear with the back of her hand before turning toward us with a tired smile.
「—What do you, mean?」
When I asked her with a stiff voice, she shrugged her shoulders slightly.
「Even you should understand it already when you see that Mitsuki isn't here. Right now Mitsuki is inside here. In other words……she failed. She planned to seal the unknown territory into herself, but she got absorbed inside—」
Shinomiya Miyako softly touched the unknown territory with a sad face. Her hand plunged without resistance into the darkness. Ripple spread on the black dome's surface.
「Tsu……there is no way—Mitsuki should be able to use Neun's authority fully. There is no way she can be swallowed by End Matter……」
「Even then it would be difficult for her "alone". The cause might be because of you scattering Neun's authority too much. Everyone there is all your mates right? If that many people are holding the authority, then obviously the power that each one of them is holding will be weaker.」
Shinomiya Miyako pointed at everyone standing at my side and told me cynically.
「How, can that—」

It felt like I was accused that everything was due to my mistake. I was speechless.
「But, I'm thankful for that right now. If Mitsuki successfully sealed the unknown territory inside herself, she would have killed herself at this time. For me, this is just a step above the worst case. There is still──something that I can do.」
After saying that, she pushed her arm even deeper into the unknown territory.
「──You, what are you planning to do!」
Kili asked with a sharp tone. Then Shinomiya Miyako gave her answer with a resolved expression.
「I'll absorb all the End Matter that Mitsuki sealed and the End matter here, and become the core of the world rebirth. If Ragnarok has perished, then that mean I'm the winner. If I can become god, I should be able to reconstruct Mitsuki who melted into the darkness in the next world.」
After answering that, she smiled kindly toward us.
「Just as planned, I'll also remake all of you. I'm not the "Heavy Tremors" Nova or even Shinomiya Miyako anymore. I'm the Ninth Dragon──the "Demise" Angolmois. That's the name of the death world that will devour this Gaia.」
Angolmois……that was the Ninth Dragon's──.
It was an information that I heard for the first time, but it seemed that Firill had already heard of it. She opened her mouth without showing any confusion.
「Before this, you said that the End Matter is "Angolmois's black egg", so this is what you mean by that. But──supposing that egg hatches and Mitsuki can be reconstructed in the new world……will that be the same Mitsuki like now?」
「……No. It's too bad but, she will be a different person only with the same construction factor. If possible I planned to bring Mitsuki alone to the new world without changing anything of her……but, now that it has come to this, the only thing that I can do is remaking her as closely to the original as possible. Together with all of you that is.」
Shinomiya Miyako shook her head with eyes that were filled with deep sadness and despair.
「Something like that──I won't let you!」
Ariella took a step forward and raised her hand. Blue light enveloped her whole body. Shinomiya Miyako spoke pityingly when she saw that.
「It's already impossible to seal this End Matter into someone. Before it was possible because it was divided into fragments. But now the End Matter is already combined into Angolmois. You can't give it other name anymore at this point.」
「Nnu……but, we can't give up.」
Ren shook her head and argued back, but Shinomiya Miyako told her challengingly.

「Then, you can try as hard as you like. But—that's only if you still have any way to try.」
「Tsu……」
Those words stopped not only Ren, but everyone from moving. We couldn't say anything back. Shinomiya Miyako waved her hand a bit at us and threw her body into the darkness.
「See you—bye bye」
Plop—the surface of the black dome rippled before it immediately returned back to normal.
We who were left behind stood still on that place.
Right now we didn't understand, what could we do, and what we should do.
We couldn't just completely swallow Shinomiya Miyako's explanation, but if it was impossible to seal the End Matter—then we had no more way to deal with it.
However Iris ran out from among us and leaped into the unknown territory.
「Mitsuki-chan! Say something if you are there!」
Then Iris's body shined blue and the flash got absorbed into the darkness.
However the blue light was swallowed by the deep and thick darkness and vanished.
「Mitsuki-chan-! Say something-! Mitsuki-chan!」
However Iris continued calling Mitsuki's name.
「……Iris?」
When I called at her in a daze, she gestured at us with her hand.
「Quick! Mononobe and everyone too, call Mitsuki-chan's name! Neun's power is residing in our voice—in our words right? Then we have to call out to Mitsuki-chan and save her!」
Saving……Mitsuki. That's right, I was here only for that—.
I strongly gritted my teeth. And then it wasn't just me who got fired up.
Lisa took a deep breath, and yelled.
「Mitsuki-san! Don't be a shut-in inside that kind of pitch black place, please get out here right away! There are a lot of things that I want to say to you!」
Her body shined blue. The flash that was radiated together with her voice pierced into the darkness. The End matter immediately tried to crush that light, but Lisa kept pouring on her words and feeling in a refusal to lose.
「—Don't tell me that you are scared of getting scolded, that's not actually the case right? I'm the one who know best that you aren't that kind of wimp! You are hopelessly stubborn and too strong that even when you are on the wrong path you will still keep on walking forward……you are that kind of stupid idiot!!」
Lisa's light swelled up and gouged the darkness. However no matter how strong her light became, Mitsuki's figure still didn't come to the surface.
「Say something back—Mitsuki-san!! Tsu……as I thought—are you saying……that you're gone already!?」
Lisa clenched her fist in frustration seeing the light she radiated vanishing into the darkness.

「……No, that’s not decided yet.」
However I tapped the shoulder of Lisa who was hanging down her head and stepped forward.
Thanks to Iris and Lisa, I could see what I should do.
I took a deep breath and sorted out my feeling, then I approached the unknown territory. And then I stood beside Iris and looked back at everyone.
「I’m, going to pick up Mitsuki. Perhaps, our voice won’t reach her from here. That’s why even Neun’s light cannot illuminate Mitsuki.」
Kili frowned hearing what I announced.
「……Isn’t it, too late already? I understand after getting sucked into the End Matter once. Even with Neun’s authority, you can’t return anymore after getting melted completely into the darkness. You won’t be able to reply even if your name is called. You will forget that you are you. Even the light won’t reach after you end up like that.」
Kili’s words were the worst possibility that anyone here wanted to deny. However what she pointed out was the most realistic possibility. However Tia took a step forward and shook her head.
「No──perhaps, we can still make it in time. There is no change to the unknown territory even though the End Matter has been combined. Perhaps Mitsuki is……doing her best inside this right now!」
Tia pointed at the black dome where Shinomiya Miyako vanished into and insisted with a strong tone.
「Mitsuki-san is……?」
Lisa was surprised. Tia nodded back at her.
「Yes. Tia think Mitsuki is still trying to seal the End Matter. If not, the Ninth Dragon……Angolmois should have start to move already.」
Kili sighed hearing that.
「If Tia is saying that much, then perhaps there really is hope remaining. But, we still have a problem. If Yuu go into there, won’t it just become a repeat of what happened to that girl?」
Certainly that possibility was high. Mitsuki was swallowed despite being able to use the authority fully, so it was only natural to think that I would end up the same. However──
「It’ll be fine. There is a way. I want everyone to keep calling out my name from outside.」
「Mononobe-kun’s name?」
Firill asked back with a puzzled look.
「Yeah, if everyone’s voice continue to illuminate me, surely I can go forward even within the darkness. When I sunk into the End Matter, I was able to regain my form thanks to everyone calling my name. Even if it’s impossible by myself, if everyone’s light is combined then surely──」
I clenched my fist and looked around at everyone’s face.
Then Ariella sighed with an exasperated look.

「……But, there is also no guarantee for that isn't it? Well, I won't stop you though. I'll continue to call Mononobe-kun's name so that we won't lose sight of you. Because that might be the only thing that I can do for you.」
「Nn……I'll also, illuminate Onii-chan. No matter what……return back with Mitsuki.」
Ren also nodded deeply and stared straight at me.
「Tia, believe in Yuu! Lisa told me before, believing on the husband and sending him off is what a good woman does!」
Tia raised her hand and said that. Lisa smiled wryly at her words.
「……If you say that, then I also can't object. Mononobe Yuu, you can entrust your back to us and head to where Mitsuki-san is. I'll cover up for you properly even if you mess up something.」
Lisa declared while puffing out her voluptuous chest. Beside her Firill also nodded.
「Take care Mononobe-kun. I……will be satisfied as long as you return so I can tell you, welcome back.」
「……I won't let you off lightly if you don't return back.」
Kili looked slightly discontent, even so she sent me off brusquely.
「Perhaps it will be impossible for me to observe outside again when you enter there, but I'll come with you.」
Atla's voice came from the terminal in my pocket.
And then beside me Iris tightly grabbed my hand and smiled.
「Mononobe, you mustn't make a scary face like that you know? Mitsuki-chan absolutely prefer Mononobe's smiling face after all……because surely, she is the same like me.」
Being told that, I realized that my expression was stiffening and massaged my face's muscles with my hand to loosen up.
「──Thank you Iris. Then, I'll go for a bit to pick up Mitsuki.」
I intentionally talked lightheartedly before standing at the edge of the black dome that was filled with End Matter.
「Yep, do your best──Mononobe.」
When Iris said my name, blue light enveloped my whole body.
Everyone behind me also called out 「Mononobe-kun」「Onii-chan」「Yuu」「Mononobe Yuu」「Mononobe-kun」「Yuu」. Each time they called out, the blue light increased in intensity.
If it was now, I could advance forward even within this darkness.
Believing that, I stepped forward into the End Matter.
.

Part 3

It was a world where there was only black. The depth and height couldn’t be perceived.
Even when I strained my eyes, there was nothing with shape that I could perceive.
However when I lifted my arm──my hand that was enveloped in bluish white light entered my sight. When I looked down, I could see my feet stepping on the darkness.
And then, there was white shadow stretching behind me. It was as though light and darkness had been reversed.
Ahead of that white shadow was most likely the outside of the unknown territory. The white shadow must be everyone’s light that was illuminating me. If I turned my focus there, the voices calling my name entered my ear.
──I’m alright. Everyone’s light is reaching me.
I ascertained that my existence was being maintained and started walking into the deep darkness.
The white shadow became the track of my steps and stretched for long. It also became a direction so that I wouldn’t lose my way inside the darkness.
「Mitsuki-!」
I called out while walking. However there was no reply. Then let’s continue advancing until I reached her.
I simply went deeper straight into the darkness.
There was no sound of footstep. In the first place it was uncertain whether I was even walking on the ground. I could only hear the sound of my breathing. Everyone’s voice was receding as I went deeper.
The white shadow that was connecting me to outside was gradually getting thinner. If this shadow was cut off, perhaps I would also get swallowed by the End Matter.
However I felt no fear. No matter how thin the shadow became, I believed that my connection with everyone would never be severed.
But, breathing was getting more difficult the deeper I went. The End Matter’s density might be increasing, or perhaps my body was getting heavier. It felt really similar like walking inside water.
Rather than this being caused by obstruction, it was simply the influence of getting closer to the center.

I wondered if this was the work of Shinomiya Miyako who entered into the unknown territory first, but right now there wasn’t any sign of that. That was why I focused only in finding Mitsuki.
If Mitsuki was still opposing the End Matter, she should be illuminating herself with Neun’s authority.
If I could find that light—the blue radiance, I could reach Mitsuki’s location.
「Mitsuki—!!」
I kept calling out to her.
My voice became a ripple of blue light that traversed the darkness before vanishing at the distance.
It gradually became harder to even just take a step forward. My voice was also getting hoarse.
But, I continued on even then. I moved my legs without stopping.
My sense of time was getting vague. The white shadow that connected me to the outside had also became as thin as string. I knew that people were calling my name, but I couldn’t recognize who was who by the sound anymore.
But, surely everyone was still yelling themselves hoarse. That was why I also desperately wrung out my voice.
「Tsu……haah……Mitsuki—!!」
Blue flash cleaved through the darkness. The ripple was spreading until the distance far away.
Ahead of it, for an instant—I saw a blue light twinkling in respond.
「That’s……!」
It finally reached. As I thought Mitsuki wasn’t melted in the darkness.
I pushed through the thick and heavy darkness to where she was.
「Mitsuki!!」
Each time I called out, the blue radiance that was visible at the distance got stronger. And then her voice also reached me.
.
「Nii……san?」
.
In that instant, a path of light was created in front of me. At the end of that path was a blue light. Most likely my light and Mitsuki’s light were illuminating each other.
My heavy body suddenly became light. The blue light enveloping my body increased in strength.
That was why I broke into a run. I ran with all my strength to reached her for even a second faster.
The destination that looked close was further than I thought. I ran out of breath and my sight became blurry.
However I didn’t reduce my speed. I abused my legs to the limit and closed the distance with her.
And then—I finally arrived.

She was crouching at the end point of the path of light. Her body was half melting into the darkness. It was transparent, her flesh body didn't remain. The blue light was just barely drawing Mitsuki's silhouette to the surface. But that radiance was blinking weakly.
「Nii-san……」
She raised her gaze when I stopped my feet. Mitsuki looked like she would disappear anytime now. The color of anguish in her expression was thick.
「Haah……tsu……haah……Mitsu, ki……Mitsuk──」
I did my best to calm down my disordered breathing while calling the name of the little sister I cherished. Then Mitsuki bit her lip in frustration before she opened her mouth.
「Please……Nii-san. Here……right now……please kill me.」
Mitsuki begged pleadingly. Seeing that, a heated emotion welled up inside me.
「Tsu……don't screw around! I come to save──」
After I reflexively shouted, I noticed Mitsuki's expression. She was apologizing to me with tears spilling out from her eyes.
「I'm sorry……Nii-san. I'm……I'm really the worst……for asking you to do something like that. Even though I know how much it will hurt Nii-san…… even though it's something that I have to do by myself……even so I have no choice but to ask Nii-san.」
「Mitsuki……」
I remembered how Iris told me to not make a scary face and exhaled deeply to calm down my feeling. And then, I gently reached out my hand to the crying Mitsuki. However my fingertip that tried to wipe her tears cut through empty air.
Even though my light had been illuminating her since some time ago, she didn't return to normal. Far from that, her silhouette was starting to thin down gradually bit by bit.
「It's……over for me. I don't even have any strength left to kill myself……the best I can do is holding back the End matter that is leaking out from inside me. No matter how much light I shine on it……this darkness won't take my shape anymore……it's just, flowing out.」
Shinomiya Miyako's words flashed at the back of my mind. With the End Matter combining, the darkness became the existence called Angolmois──she said that nobody could seal it anymore…….
「Perhaps, the End Matter will devour me from the inside before long. When that happen……this world will surely get swallowed by this darkness. But if it's now……more than half of the End Matter is within me.」
「That's why──you are telling me to kill it together with you Mitsuki?」
I asked while being aware that my voice sounded shrill.
「Yes. With the power of Code Lost, it should be possible to destroy the majority of End Matter together with me. Then most likely……the worst situation will be prevented. Perhaps, half of the world will at least still remain……」

Mitsuki said that and smiled at me to put on a brave front.
「The worst situation, huh……」
But those words got stuck in my mind. I kneeled to match my gaze with Mitsuki and told her bluntly.
「I won't listen to your request Mitsuki. The worst situation for me is for you to die.」
Mitsuki's expression distorted at my words and she pleaded while spilling tears.
「Tsu……I, know. I know that the current Nii-san will definitely say something like that! But, what's the worst for me is if Nii-san can't become happy! My happiness is for Nii-san to be happy! That's why……this is my request of a lifetime! If Nii-san really treasure me, then please prioritize my happiness!」
「――――」
Mitsuki's scream stabbed deeply into my chest. Because it felt like I was being told that I was prioritizing my own desire instead of Mitsuki's. But――.
「Killing Mitsuki……and living in a world without Mitsuki, there is no way I can be happy like that.」
If Mitsuki was wishing for my happiness, then her excuse didn't have any leg to stand on anymore at that point. However Mitsuki shook her head with a desolate look.
「No――Nii-san has Iris-san and others. After the danger of Ninth Dragon leave, Nii-san will lose Neun's authority and then you should realize your true feeling. Someone else than me will become Nii-san's number one. That's why……Nii-san will definitely become happy!」
My obstinate little sister argued with a strong tone and strong glint of willpower in her eyes.
――As I thought, this was why.
The reason Mitsuki wrecked Marduk and flew away. Her motive for choosing to sacrifice herself.
It was about Mitsuki not becoming my "most important existence" if I lost Neun's instinct.
This talk wouldn't progress unless I corrected that misunderstanding first.
「Mitsuki, you are harboring too much scorn.」
I stared straight into her black eyes and said.
「Scorn……? On, Nii-san?」
「No, on yourself. I'm reluctant to say something like this to my little sister who is also my childhood friend but……you, don't know just how cute you actually are right?」
「Wha――」
Mitsuki was speechless. Her eyes widened like saucer. If her body wasn't fading, surely her face would turn red like boiled octopus. After all that was exactly the state I was in right now.
「First is――your expression I guess. Your face when smiling or sulking is extraordinarily cute. And then there is the way your finger play with your

hair, or the way you run when chasing after me……I've been thinking all this time of how cute they are. The way you are slightly petite is also…… how should I say it, it's just right for me……I could never keep my calm when you looked up at me.」
I endured my embarrassment and listed Mitsuki's cute parts.
「U-umm umm, Nii-san──w-what are you saying! Please stop……that's──」
Mitsuki pressed her hands on her cheeks while her body writhed. To be honest that gesture was also cute.
「And most of all……the way how since the past──since we were still children──how you so straightforwardly directed your affection only to me all that time until now is something that make me happy, proud……it made me think that I'd never hand you over to anybody else. Mitsuki who was always following me around no matter where I go simply looked unbearably cute to me.」
「Aa geez……Nii-san you stupid……stupid stupid……」
Mitsuki shook her head while complaining over and over at me with a small voice.
「If a girl like that told me that she want to marry me, and even give me an engagement kiss……of course it'd make me got serious too. Even though I was still unable to realize feeling or love or the like at that time, all those things had definitely made you to be my most important person whether I wanted it or not.」
When we were children, at that day when we climbed the mountain together until the viewing platform……I and Mitsuki exchanged a promise of marriage and our first kiss.
「That was something before the traffic accident──before I became Neun. That's why the instinct doesn't matter. I, the plain Mononobe Yuu had decided that Mitsuki is my most important person.」
I kept talking without giving Mitsuki any chance to argue, but there Mitsuki finally lifted up her face and spoke back with a shaky voice.
「B-but……Nii-san right now has other important people than me……when Nii-san lost Neun's instinct, surely someone like me will──」
「I told you that's just your underestimation. Even though I have changed, Mitsuki hasn't changed at all right? I too will only return to the me before becoming Neun. Then──the situation will be the same like when we were children. There is no way I won't fall in love with Mitsuki.」
I insisted at Mitsuki who was swallowed by darkness and fading. I thrust the immovable truth into her and waited for her answer.
「But……but──」
However Mitsuki was still showing hesitation. Seeing that, I resolved myself. To be honest, I didn't want to say this if possible but, it couldn't be helped. Things like a man's pride or a big brother's dignity, I threw away those things and opened my mouth.
「Even if by any chance, I forget my feeling toward Mitsuki──supposing that happen. At that time can you……do something like, approaching my lightly

for example. If you do that then I'll easily fall for you. I guarantee it. I can even bet all my assets on it.」
My pathetic confession caused Mitsuki to stare in a daze at me with her mouth gaping wide open.
However, after a while she chuckled.
「……Nii-san doesn't need to bet all your assets on htat. I'll be in charge of all Nii-san's money anyway when we marry in the future.」
「Eh──」
Now it was my turn to lose my words at that unexpected reply. Mitsuki looked at my reaction and let out a long sigh.
「I'm half joking. But, I understand what Nii-san is trying to say. It even makes me feel stupid for worrying about all those things until now.」
「A-aa……if you understand now, that's great.」
I didn't know which part of what she said was the joke, but I was relieved that Mitsuki finally showed me a bright smile. However Mitsuki's expression immediately got clouded.
「But……Nii-san is, horrible. Even though the situation hasn't changed at all, you only change my heart──it will only hurt us needlessly like this. Even though, I'm at my limit already to hold back the End Matter……even though there is still no changing the fact that I have to die──」
Even though Mitsuki's misunderstanding had been corrected, it didn't mean that the situation had turned for the better. It was exactly as she said. However for me, persuading Mitsuki was the first step for what we were going to do from here.
「If you're at your limit, you don't need to continue to force yourself. Just let it all go. If you aren't devoured from the inside, you should be able to regain your own form after that Mitsuki.」
「Wha-……Nii-san, what are you saying? If I do something like that then the End Matter will overflow to the whole world, in the end even we will──」
Mitsuki spoke at me anxiously.
「Certainly eliminating half of the End Matter here is the realistic decision to make. But──even if the damage can be reduced by half with that, the damage will still be immense. And Mitsuki will also die. If that's what's going to happen, I'd rather bet on the possibility where everyone can be protected.」
「The possibility of protecting everyone?」
Mitsuki asked back while showing bewilderment. I kept my eyes trained on her eyes while nodding. Then I told her my plan.
「Shinomiya Miyako said it. That Neun's authority was dispersed too much, making it weak. But, conversely speaking, it will be strengthened if everyone combines their strength. Perhaps we will also be able to oppose the combined End Matter──Angolmois with that.」
「You said perhaps……there is no guarantee of that isn't it?」
「Well yeah. But, there is no other option right? I absolutely can't kill Mitsuki, I won't kill you. Even if all the remaining mankind will resent me

for it, I have no intention of sacrificing Mitsuki. Surely Iris and others also feel the same.」
I said that and smiled. I offered my hand to the taken aback Mitsuki.
「Now, throw away all the End Matter that you can't hold back. We're going back to everyone.」
「Nii-san……」
Mitsuki stared fixedly at my hand, then she gave me a troubled smile.
「I……thought that what I was doing this time was something very selfish but……Nii-san is also just as selfish. You refuse to accept anything other than getting anything and everything saved, that's just outrageously spoiled.」
「Well, I guess. In short――」
I continued with a wry smile. My next words overlapped with Mitsuki's voice.
.
「Like brother like sister.」
「Like brother like sister isn't it?」
.
And then Mitsuki's fading fingertip touched me. This time there was a definite sensation of touch from her.
She must have stopped holding back the End Matter. Black particles surged out from Mitsuki's body like mist. The darkness around us was getting thicker.
However Mitsuki's body was shining brightly in inverse proportion to that. She had regained her actual body in the blink of eye.
「We're running, Mitsuki.」
When Mitsuki became able to stand, I pulled her hand and started running.
There was a white shadow that was like a thin string remaining on the path that I had walked until here. This was the light that everyone shined on me. If we followed this white line, we should be able to return to where everyone was.
But, perhaps because of the influence of the thickening End Matter, the white shadow was vanishing. We would lose sight of the path if we didn't hurry.
「I can hear Iris-san and Lisa-san's voices……no, Firill-san and Tia-san…… Ariella-san and Ren-san too……even Kili-san……」
It seemed that even Mitsuki was able to hear everyone's voice. A smile formed on her lips.
But another voice got mixed into those calling voices. It resounded from the darkness around us.
.
「――Onii-san, I got a slightly better opinion of you now. As I thought, you are the only one who can move Mitsuki's heart.」
.

Hearing that voice that was slightly mixed with loneliness in it, I looked around without stopping my running legs.
「……Shinomiya Miyako huh. You──intentionally didn't get in my way didn't you?」
It was unnatural that she didn't do anything to interfere with me even though she had entered the unknown territory first. I should think of it as her deliberately watching me carefully rather than her not noticing me.
「Miyako-san……? Are you there?」
Mitsuki who was running with her hand being pulled by me also asked toward the darkness.
「Yeo, I've been here the whole time. I also listened to that embarrassing talk.」
A mischievous laugh was mixed into Shinomiya Miyako's voice.
Mitsuki's face reddened. I could feel that she was putting strength in her hand that was gripping mine.
「Good for you Mitsuki. Onii-san came for you and your true wish came true──you can laugh like that, I'm really happy for you. If Mitsuki can be happy, then that's enough for me.」

The voice sounded genuinely happy. It bewildered Mitsuki.
「Tsu……why are you──could it be that you are really……」
Mitsuki seemed to realize something, but Shinomiya Miyako cut off her words.
「No, I'm a fake as expected. I'm just a dreg. And now I'm the core of the Ninth Dragon──the "Demise" Angolmois. That's why, I'm your enemy regardless of anything.」
Warmth vanished from Shinomiya Miyako's voice. Her tone became pointedly cold.
「Mitsuki had liberated End Matter, so Angolmois is already starting to swallow the world autonomously. I can't stop that. I can only take part directly after this planet is swallowed──only with the process of the world's rebirth.」
Despite saying that she was an enemy, there was tone of frustration mixed in Shinomiya Miyako's voice.
「……Miyako.」
Mitsuki weakly muttered the name of the girl who was her best friend. She didn't added honorific to that name anymore.
「Well, I planned to "avoid eating" Mitsuki anyway……if it's just you two then I might be able to save you two. But……it's impossible for the others. All lives of Gaia will be swallowed and melted into the darkness. Even if I can reconstruct them later, they will be different people only with the same appearance. Something like that is not that different from dying right?」
「──Yeah, you're right.」
I ran facing forward while nodding deeply. Perhaps even if Iris and others got resurrected with such method, even if I was reunited with my parents at Japan, I wouldn't be able to think of them as the same people if they were different in the inside.
「Yes, that's why……all of you have to defeat me. I can't lose intentionally, so give it everything you have. The feeling of End Matter that want to live more──that don't want to end is just that strong.」
I gritted my teeth hearing those words.
In the end, Shinomiya Miyako was only acting for Mitsuki's sake. Even though she became a sacrifice in the fight against "Purple" Kraken, right now she was wishing for her death once more for Mitsuki's sake again.
Actually, this might not be something that I shouldn't say. But, I couldn't let it go unasked.
「Don't you……want to live? When End Matter is reborn……you will also be able to obtain true life right?」

Mitsuki's hand stiffened slightly. Mitsuki's feeling toward Shinomiya Miyako was greater than me. Perhaps she wouldn't be able to fight depending on the answer from this question.
However it was better than pretending to not look at this matter and then hesitating at the critical moment.
「……I'm, fine with this.」
The reply that came back was words that were mixed with a wry laugh.
「Really……?」
Mitsuki asked back hesitantly.
「Yes──it's just a guess, but I already obtained a new life. I think I was reborn, and obtained a happy life……a life where I can live together with Mitsuki again.」
「Eh……」
Mitsuki let out a bewildered voice at Shinomiya Miyako's words.
But there was something that clicked inside me. Because I knew that Shinomiya Miyako's soul was residing inside Shion.
「That's, could it be──」
I tried to question her further, but she continued speaking before that.
「That's why, destroy this fake vessel. Because if you do that then surely……I should be able to return back. I'm counting on you, Onii-san. No……papa.」
「────Yeah, got it.」
I understood everything and told myself that the only thing that I should do right now was sweeping away this darkness. I nodded deeply.
Mitsuki too seemed to have guessed the situation somehow. She strongly grasped my hand.
The white line that was guiding us was getting thicker. We could see a blue light in the darkness far away at the distance.
Just a bit more──everyone was calling me.
「That's right, just one last thing……I don't know if this will be any help but, I'll tell you something. The true identity of the authority that all of you are using……that blue light.」
Shinomiya Miyako told us in a whisper while the light that everyone was radiating was enveloping us.
「The true identity of──Neun's power?」
I asked back in surprise. Come to think of it, when I, Firill, and the others escaped from End Matter, Shinomiya Miyako acted like she knew something about Neun's authority.
Was she referring to that? Her reply reached my ear while I was thinking that.
「Yep. I understand because I can peek at the memory of the dead world. That's the power of higher life form that had resisted the End Matter for the longest──"Shamash(Universe Establishing Blue Light)". That name has been passed down as the name of the oldest sun god, but I think perhaps that's because the people of Atlantis also knew about that existence.」
「Shamash……」

I repeated that name, the form of the power. For some reason it felt strangely fitting.
「Yes……but you see, but even that higher life form finally ran out of strength just moment before it arrived at Gaia and the End Matter swallowed it. And then it immediately turned into calamity that trampled this planet……」
「Eh……」
A calamity that came from outside the planet──didn't that sounded like a "true dragon" then?
Shinomiya Miyako continued speaking at the confused me.
「And its name is……"Disasterification" Apocalypse. The existence that all of you called as the Seventh Dragon.」
Apocalypse──I remembered that Shinomiya Miyako also mentioned that name before this…….
「Tsu……wait a second. Why is the power of a "true dragon"──residing inside us as Neun's authority?」
I couldn't accept it at all right away and asked her back.
「I don't know until that far. But……if Apocalypse devoured the world and then be reborn……」
The blue light enveloped us and the darkness was receding. Shinomiya Miyako's voice was also getting smaller.
「──Miyako!」
Mitsuki looked back and yelled. However we couldn't possibly stop running. The darkness that was trying to devour us should be hot on our heel after all.
I focused my ear to Shinomiya Miyako's voice that was getting smaller while pulling Mitsuki's arm and leaped into the light.
「Apocalypse, might be very close to all of you. Mitsuki──search for the source of light. Find the sun that is illuminating you. That will surely become the key to destroy Angolmois──」
Her voice was cut off there. In exchange our comrades' voices enveloped us. Wind caressed my cheek. I felt the ground below my feet.
「Ah, we have returned. As I thought, I couldn't observe anything at all inside there, but I'll praise you for accomplishing your objective safely.」
Atla's slightly excited voice came from my pocket.
That voice convinced me that we had come out from the unknown territory, but I couldn't see anything. My eyes were dazzled from being inside a dark place the whole time.
「Mononobe! Mitsuki-chan!」
Before my eyes could get used to the light, someone cheered joyfully and hugged me. But I knew who it was right away from the voice.
「I-Iris-san, I can't breathe……」
Mitsuki who was hugged together with me spoke to her──to Iris with a troubled voice.

My eyes got used to the light while that was going on. Everyone's tearful faces entered my eyes.
「……I'm back.」
I was at a loss of what I should say first, so for the time being I spoke the returning home greeting.
「Yes, welcome back……Mononobe-kun. And Mitsuki too……thank god.」
Firil replied with a high-pitched voice.
「We were really worried because you took really long inside there. My voice was already getting hoarse.」
「Nn, I……usually never use my voice so much like this, so my throat hurt.」
Ariella and Ren were smiling even though they were complaining.
「Welcome back you two! Tia believed that you can do it Yuu!」
Tia raised both her hands in happiness, but beside her Kili was glaring at Mitsuki sullenly.
「Mononobe Mitsuki──this is my first time calling someone else's name so much like this. You have put us into this much trouble, so you should also suffer by writing a lot of written apologies. I won't allow you to excuse yourself from that just because you're the student council president.」
「──Just this time I'm in complete agreement with Kili-san.」
Lisa stepped forward while saying that.
The tension was stretched thin from the aura of anger that was drifting from her whole body. Mitsuki slipped out from Iris's hug and deeply bowed her head toward Lisa.
「Lisa-san……and everyone, I have greatly troubled all of you. Simply apologizing might not be enough for that but……I'm really sorry.」
However Lisa's expression didn't slacken even after seeing that.
「True. You can't be forgiven just by apologizing. So──how many pages are you going to write?」
「Eh?」
Mitsuki was dumbfounded. Lisa told her.
「I'm asking about the written apology. How many pages of written apology are you going to write Mitsuki-san? If my memory serves me right, Ariella-san wrote twenty pages while Kili-san wrote more than fifty pages last time……」
「U-umm……then, a hundred page……」
Mitsuki answered in bewilderment. Lisa folded her arms and nodded deeply at that.
「──I guess. Nobody will complain if you write that many pages.」
Lisa glanced at Kili. Kili who noticed that glance nodded「Well, I guess」even though she still looked discontent.
「It looks like Kili-san can also accept it. There is no problem with this. Of course that──also include me.」
After saying that, Lisa's body trembled all over. She then couldn't hold back herself anymore and hugged Mitsuki right from the front.

「Geez……Mitsuki-san you are really──you always worrying by yourself and then charged ahead on your own……you always made other worry a lot!」
Lisa yelled with moist eyes and tearful voice.
「Lisa-san……I'm sorry.」
Mitsuki timidly put her hands around Lisa's back and apologized once more.
「Please talk with us from the start if you're going to apologize like this in the end……am I really that unreliable to you?」
「N-no……you're a reliable person. Because Lisa-san is here I can leave the rest to you……」
「I don't need that kind of trust! I……want to be a reason……that enable Mitsuki-san to live right now……I want to simply be your close friend!! Is this feeling of mine just something one-sided!?」
Lisa yelled as though she was squeezing out what she had been holding back until now. A drop of tear spilled out from Mitsuki's eye.
「──No……. Me……too. I also want to, with Lisa-san……」
The two hugged each other strongly as though to ascertain their feeling.
I was relieved that things settled down peacefully, but I felt an unpleasant chill and turned around.
The boundary of unknown territory had closed the distance until right behind us without me noticing. The dome had swelled up bigger than when we left it.
When I looked up, I could see the surface of the black dome was bubbling up unevenly everywhere.
「Everyone──let's continue the happy reunion later. I think that perhaps, the darkness will flood out from this unknown territory and swallow the world soon.」
When I looked around once more, Ragnarok's mist had thinned down greatly.
I could see seawater pouring in from everywhere. *GOOOOOOO*──that roaring sound was most likely the sound of water rushing to this center of the city.
We wouldn't be able to stay in this place for long, whether it was because of the overflowing End Matter or from the flooding seawater.
「Eh……swallowing the world you say──w-what should we do then?」
Iris asked with a flustered look.
「Everyone will combine their strength to illuminate this darkness with Neun's light. If we can somehow grant "shape" to it, we will be able to avoid the darkness spreading endlessly in one go.」
I explained to everyone. Then Firill raised her hand slightly with an anxious look.
「Miyako……said that this darkness cannot be sealed inside someone anymore didn't she? Even if you said to give it a shape, how can──」
「Right now the name and shape that can be given to this lump of End Matter is only one. Shinomiya Miyako called her current self as the

“Demise” Angolmois. That’s why we’ll put that name into our voices and expose this thing’s form.」
Surely this was also something that Shinomiya Miyako intentionally told us in order to give us a chance of victory.
I turned toward the growing unknown territory and held up my left hand.
「I don’t really get it but……I get it! I’ll also do my best if Mononobe is doing it!」
Iris said that and stood beside me.
「Tia understand it properly! Tia’ll fight together with Yuu!」
Tia and others also immediately rushed toward me.
「Nii-san, I can start anytime.」
Mitsuki told me that she had finished preparing. Everyone else also nodded at me and waited for my instruction.
I didn’t know whether this would succeed or not. Even if our light could illuminate this darkness, I couldn’t even imagine what kind of form would come out──what kind of thing Angolmois was.
However, this was the only thing that we could do right now.
When I focused my mind, blue light flowed out from my dragon crest.
「Everyone, listen. This light is──”Shamash”. Illuminate the darkness with that light! Yell the name together with me!」
「Understood!」
Lisa replied in the place of everyone. I took a deep breath.
I strongly focused on the authority that resided in my voice and sharply shouted the words of light that illuminated everything.
.
「Show your form── “Demise” Angolmois!」
.
Everyone also yelled after me.
The blue flash swelled up and swallowed the darkness that was about to collapse on us.
The radiant light shaved off the black dome of End Matter. The darkness that had ambiguous shape was illuminated and its original form rose to the surface.
But, the End Matter wasn’t erased with this. We were simply pushing it into a vessel called Angolmois forcefully.
The vessel’s shape wouldn’t be defined if the light was insufficient. The overflowing darkness would devour all of it.
「AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!」
I mustered out my voice until I ran out of breath.
The blue light became one with our voices. It spread out like a ripple.
Everyone’s voice combined with eac other. The twisted darkness was taking shape.
The bundled light was increasing in radiance. Finally something like a silhouette was rising to the forefront.

However, I realized my body was shaking when seeing the form of the thing that was being defined inside the light.
—What, is that……?
The destruction that obtained shape, the manifested figure of demise was just too sinister, and then—.

Epilogue

.
NIFL’s battleship Naglfar was observing the vanishing Ragnarok’s mist and the appearing dome of unknown territory from the air.
Because seawater was flowing into the space that was isolated by the mist, the sea below was greatly undulating.
「Shinomiya-sensei──the signal from the terminals of Firill Crest, Ariella Lu, Iris Freya, and Tia Lightning who were kidnapped has been confirmed! Captain and others are also near them……ah──there is also Mononobe Mitsuki’s signal!」
Jeanne Hortensia’s excited voice resounded through the bridge of Naglfar.
All this time Jeanne had been searching for Firill and others using the observation equipments after they were kidnapped by the suddenly appearing Shinomiya Miyako.
「Tsu……I see, so they are alive……thank god.」
Shinomiya Haruka who was sitting on the seat for radio operator had been calling for everyone continuously before this. Now she sighed in relief.
「──It looks like the signal jamming vanished after the mist started to disappear. Atla, synchronize with the other you there and report the situation.」
Loki Jotunheim who was sitting on the captain seat ordered the fairy who was busily flying around inside the monitor.
「Roger! Err……it seems they succeeded in recovering Mononobe Mitsuki, but now the unknown territory is in the verge of exploding. Currently they are trying to deal with it using Neun’s power.」
The mechanical intelligence Atla was reporting while displaying the image of receiving electronic signal.
Right after that, the monitor that was displaying the unknown territory was filled with bluish white light.
「The flash is confirmed at the position where the signals of captain and others are from! The unknown territory──is shrinking!」
Jeanne immediately reported the situation to everyone.
Then the black haired little girl who was standing quietly at the edge of the bridge until now──”Black” Vritra lifted up her face.
「This is Neun’s authority──however seeing that Mononobe Mitsuki is safe, that means they didn’t choose the method that I taught them.」
Vritra muttered that, but her expression didn’t look that disappointed.

「Is the unknown territory disappearing?」
Shinomiya Haruka asked Jeanne with a voice that was filled with expectation. However the expression of Jeanne who was running her eyes through the observation device stiffened.
「No……the existence of something gigantic is detected from inside the unknown territory──Atla, adjust the brightness and display the image!」
「Mu……originally I won't listen to anyone's order than master but……I'll make an exception just for this time.」
Atla puffed up her cheeks in discontent, even so she projected the image in the biggest monitor just as requested.
「This is──」
Loki narrowed her eyes seeing the silhouette that was appearing inside the light.
That silhouette was covered with a lot of gaps. The outline was twisted and its appearance was far removed from the natural functional beauty that living creature should have.
Of course that was the case──the squirming shadow inside the blue light could only be described as countless bones that were fused messily with each other.
「Bone……no, that's just skulls.」
Vritra muttered to herself.
It was just as she said. That shadow was only formed from skulls. They were so big that they could be distinguished even from the far distance image. The skulls looked like the skull of dinosaur or carnivorous animal. There were also skulls that looked like human skull, but they were too small that they couldn't be seen clearly.
The remains of the dead that should be impossible to obtain life no matter how many of them were gathered──were squirming and gathering together, transforming into a single huge form.
A gigantic torso, legs that stepped on the ground, claws for tearing apart prey, wings so large that it looked like they were covering the sky, nine heads that wanted to devour every living things──.
「Bone, dragon……?」
Jeanne described that figure with a hoarse voice.
Shinomiya Haruka who was staring fixedly at the monitor muttered with a voice that couldn't hide her bewilderment.
「Is that……dragon's corpse? Or is it alive……Jeanne Hortensia, is there any sign of life from that?」
「None. But……it's moving. It's still……growing. It's like bones are growing from inside the bones……tsu……what's with this size──even though there is no way a creature with that kind of skull can exist──」
Jeanne let out a shocked voice.
One of the nine heads had a gigantic size that clearly surpassed the rest.
Atla confirmed that and immediately reported her analysis report.

「No, it exist in the database. The biggest skull—it's almost exactly the same match with Bahamut's skeletal structure!」
Hearing those words, Vritra touched the vine collar that was binding her power and formed a stiff smile.
「The dead and the corpses of calamities……the nine headed dragon that embodied demise, huh. There is no form than that that is more fitting for the one that will destroy the world. It looks like the time where we have to fight together has arrived—my comrade.」

Afterword

.
It’s Tsukasa.
The series is already at the thirteenth volume when I realized it. Thank you very much for picking up Unlimited Fafnir XIII Stardust Cry.
To be honest, it’s my first time entering the domain of volume 13 numbering. One of my previous series reached a total of 16 volumes, but the volume numbering was reset at volume 12, so volume 13 didn’t exist.
That’s why, this volume is a book where I took a new step forward (exaggerating). And coincidentally this year is also the tenth year since my debut, so it made me emotional somehow.
When I tried looking back, it was ten years where I never knew of even the next step to take.
When I debuted, I was a fourth year college student. When I was contacted about winning a prize, I immediately turned down an unofficial offer from a certain company. That decision came from my feeling that wanted to focus on writing, but at that point of time I still didn’t even know whether I would be able to publish a book. This thing called momentum is really scary.
After that I worked part-time while doing my writing, but even when my debut work that got serialized continued to be published, I didn’t know what would happen from there and I still couldn’t really feel the awareness that I had become a “light novel writer”.
What should I do so I could live as a novelist. Such question was in my mind the whole time while I attended various events, or tried writing a work that wasn’t for my job. I just struggled with anything that came into mind.
And then I formed many connections through that and had a fortunate encounter—even now I somehow can still write my story.
But in the end, even now I didn’t understand something like “the way to live as light novel writer”. My sight forward was still pitch black.
But even within such darkness there were glimpses of light that could be seen—those lights might be the people who I got involved with in these ten years. It felt like that as long as I could see those lights, at least I wouldn’t lose sight of the direction where I should go to.
The volume this time, Stardust Cry is also a story of facing deep darkness, although in different connotation (I made that slightly embarrassing poetic representation in order to forcefully connect it to this. Seriously).

Mitsuki who flew away carrying End Matter with her, and Yuu and others who were chasing after her. How did they face the darkness and fight it—I hope that everyone will keep following their story until the end.
Then for the thanks.
Korie Riko-sensei. You have drawn lovely and cute illustrations too this time, thank you very much!
This work called Fafnir could catch the eyes of many people and made them picked it up is undoubtedly thanks to Korie-sensei. I believe that the charming characters that are drawn by Korie-sensei is really are the “light” illuminating this work.
My editor Shouji-sama. My apologies for troubling you this time too with the scheduling. I’m really thankful for your precise advice and swift reaction. Being connected with Shouji-sama is one of my greatest lucks. Please take care of me from here on too.
And then to all the readers who picked up Unlimited Fafnir, my greatest thanks to all of you.
It’s all of you readers who illuminated the “future” of this series. Surely I wouldn’t be able to come this far without the support of everyone.
I’ll write the climax from here with everything I have!
Then, let’s meet again later.
.

Januari 2017 Tsukasa

銃皇無尽のファフニール13
ゴーストを怖がってるリーザさん萌!!!

COMICS

銃皇無尽のファフニール

UNLIMITED FAFNIR

単行本1～4巻、好評発売中!

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Credits

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